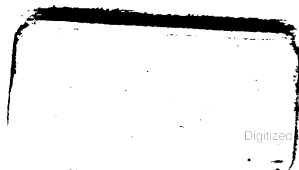


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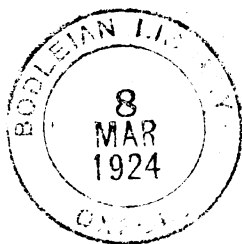
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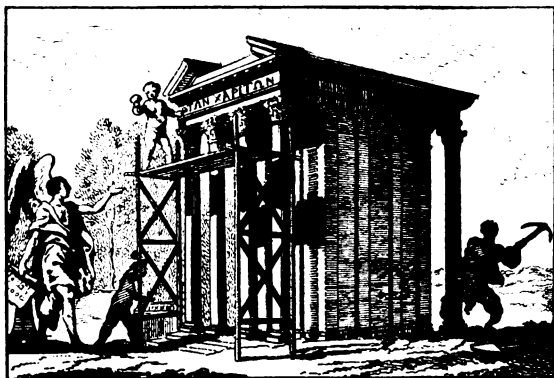
AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
PRESENT STATE
OF
POLITE LEARNING.

Ἐμοὶ πρὸς φιλοσοφίας ἐστὶ φιλία· πρὸς μὲν τοὺς
σοφιστὰς ἢ γραμματιστὰς· ὥστε νῦν ἐστὶ φιλία
μῆτε ὑπερὸν ποτε γένοιτο.

Tolerabile si Ædificia nostra diruerent Ædifi-
candi capaces.



AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
PRESENT STATE
OF
POLITE LEARNING
IN
EUROPE.



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AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
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CHAP. I.
INTRODUCTION.

IT has been so long the practice to represent literature as declining, that every renewal of this complaint now comes with diminish'd influence. The publick has been often excited by a false alarm, so that at present the nearer we approach the threatned period of decay, the more our fatal security increases.

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2 The PRESENT STATE

To deplore the prostitution of learning, and despise cotemporary merit, it must be owned, have too often been the resource of the envious or disappointed, the dictates of resentment not impartiality. The writer, possessed of fame, is willing to enjoy it without a rival, by lessening every competitor; the unsuccessful author is desirous to turn upon others the contempt which is levelled at himself, and being convicted at the bar of literary justice, vainly hopes for pardon by accusing every brother of the same profession.

SENSIBLE of this; the writer of the following essay is at a loss where to find an apology for his conduct, in still persisting to arraign the merit of the age; for joining in a cry which the judicious have long since left to be kept up by the vulgar, and for adopting the sentiments of the multitude
in

OF POLITE LEARNING. 3

in a performance that at best can please only the Few.

COMPLAINTS of our degeneracy in literature as well as in morals, I own have been frequently exhibited of late ; but seem to be enforced more with the ardour of devious declamation, than the calmness of deliberate enquiry. The dullest critic, who strives at a reputation for delicacy, by shewing he cannot be pleased, may pathetically assure us that our taste is upon the decline, may consign every modern performance to oblivion, and bequeath nothing to posterity except the labours of our ancestors, and his own. Such general invective, however, conveys no instruction ; all it teaches is, that the writer dislikes an age by which he is probably disregarded. The manner of being useful on the subject would be to point out the symptoms, to investigate the causes, and

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direct to the remedies of the approaching decay. This is a subject hitherto unattempted in criticism, perhaps it is the only subject in which criticism can be useful.

To mark out, therefore, the corruptions that have found way into the republick of letters, to attempt the rescuing of genius from the shackles of pedantry and criticism, to distinguish the decay, naturally consequent on an age like ours grown old in literature, from every erroneous innovation which admits a remedy, to take a view of those societies which profess the advancement of polite learning, and by a mutual opposition of their excellencies and defects to attempt the improvement of each, is the design of this essay.

How far the writer is equal to such an undertaking the reader must determine ; but
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OF POLITE LEARNING. 5

this may be asserted without the imputation of vanity, that he enters the lists with no disappointments to bias his judgment, nor will he ever reprove but with a desire to reform. The defects of his execution may be compensated by the usefulness of his design, his observations may be just, tho' his manner of expressing them should only serve as an example of the errors he undertakes to reprove.

IF the present enquiry were a topick of speculative curiosity, calculated to fill up a few vacant moments in literary indolence, I should think my labour ill bestowed. To rank in the same despicable class with the dissertations, ænigma's, problems, and other periodical compilations with which even idleness is cloyed at present, is by no means my ambition. True learning and true morality are closely connected ; to im-

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prove the head will insensibly influence the heart, a deficiency of taste and a corruption of manners are sometimes found mutually to produce each other.

DISSENTING from received opinions may frequently render this essay liable to correction, yet the reader may be assured that a passion for singularity never gives rise to the error. Novelty is not permitted to usurp the place of reason ; it may attend, but shall not conduct the enquiry. The more original however any performance is, the more it is liable to deviate ; for cautious stupidity is always in the right. In literature as in commerce the value of the acquisition is generally proportioned to the hazard of the adventure. I shall think therefore with freedom, and bear correction with candour. It is but just that he who dissents from others
should

OF POLITE LEARNING. 7

should not be displeased if others differ from him. The applause of a few, a very few, will satisfy ambition, and even ill-nature must confess that I have been willing to advance the reputation of the age at the hazard of my own.

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CHAP.

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C H A P. II.

Of the decline of ancient learning.

IF we consider the revolutions which have happened in the common wealth of letters, survey the rapid progress of learning in one period of antiquity, or its amazing decline in another, we shall be almost induc'd to accuse nature of partiality, as if she had exhausted all her efforts in adorning one age, while she left the succeeding entirely neglected. It is not to nature, however, but to ourselves alone that this partiality must be ascrib'd ; the seeds of excellence are sown in every age, and it is wholly owing to a wrong direction in the passions or pursuits of mankind that they have not received the proper cultivation. It is not nature that is fatigued with producing

OF POLITE LEARNING. 9

ducing her wonders so much as we that are fatiated with admiration.

As in the best regulated societies, the very laws which at first give the government solidity, may in the end contribute to its dissolution, so the efforts which might have promoted learning in its feeble commencement may, if continued, retard its progress. The paths of science which were at first intricate because untrodden, may at last grow toilsome because too much frequented. As learning advances, the candidates for its honours may become more numerous, and the acquisition of fame more uncertain; the modest may despair of attaining it, and the opulent think it too precarious to pursue; thus the task of supporting the honour of the times may at last devolve on indigence and effrontery,

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effrontery, and learning partake the contempt of its professors.

To illustrate these assertions it may be proper to take a slight review of the decline of ancient learning ; to consider how far its depravation was owing to the impossibility of supporting continued perfection ; in what respects it proceeded from voluntary corruption ; and how far it was hastened on by accidental event. If Modern learning be compared with Ancient in these different lights, a parallel between both, which has hitherto produced only vain dispute, may contribute to amusement, perhaps, instruction. We shall thus be enabled to perceive what period of antiquity the present age most resembles, whether we are making advances towards excellence or retiring again to primeval obscurity ; we shall, by their example,

OF POLITE LEARNING. II

ple, be taught to acquiesce in those defects which it is impossible to prevent ; and reject all faulty innovations tho' offered under the specious titles of improvement.

IN early ages when man was employed in acquiring necessary subsistence, or in defending his acquisitions, when without laws or society he led a precarious life, while even the savage rivalled him in the dominion of the forest; in such times of fatigue and darkness we must not look for the origin of arts or learning, which are the offspring of security, opulence and ease. When experience taught the advantages of society, when native freedom was exchanged for social security, when man began to feel the benefit of laws, and the mind had leisure for the contemplation of nature and itself, then, probably, the sciences might have been cultivated

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vated to add strength to the rising community, and the polite arts introduced to promote its enjoyments.

LEARNING, when planted in any country, is transient and fading, nor does it flourish till slow gradations of improvement have naturalized it to the soil. It makes feeble advances, begins among the vulgar, and rises into reputation among the great. It cannot be established in a state at once, by introducing the learned of other countries; these may grace a court, but seldom enlighten a kingdom. Ptolemy Philadelphus, Constantine Porphyrogeneta, Alfred, or Charlemagne, might have invited learned foreigners into their dominions, but could not establish learning. While in the radiance of royal favour, every art and science seemed to flourish,

flourish, but when that was withdrawn, they quickly felt the rigours of a strange climate, and with exotic constitutions perished by neglect.

As the arts and sciences are slow in coming to maturity, it is requisite in order to their perfection, that the state should be permanent, which gives them reception. There are numberless attempts without success, and experiments without conclusion, between the first rudiments of an art, and its utmost perfection, between the outlines of a shadow, and the picture of an Apelles. Leisure is required to go through the tedious interval, to join the experience of predecessors to our own, or enlarge our views, by building on the ruined attempts of former adventurers. All this may be performed in a society of long continuance; but

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but if the kingdom be but of short duration, as was the case of Arabia, learning seems coeval, sympathizes with its political struggles, and is annihilated in its dissolution.

BUT permanence in a state, is not alone sufficient, it is requisite also for this end that it should be free. Naturalists assure us, that all animals are sagacious in proportion as they are removed from the tyranny of others ; in native liberty, the elephant is a citizen, and the beaver, an architect ; but whenever the tyrant man intrudes upon their community, their spirit is broken, they seem anxious only for safety, and their intellects suffer an equal diminution with their prosperity. The parallel will hold with regard to mankind ; fear naturally represses invention, benevolence,
I ambi-

OF POLITE LEARNING. 15

ambition ; for in a nation of slaves, as in the despotic governments of the east, to labour after fame is to be a candidate for danger.

FOR a state to attain literary excellence, besides, it is requisite, that the soil and climate should, as much as possible, conduce to happiness. The earth must supply man with the necessaries of life, before he has leisure, or inclination, to pursue its more refined enjoyments. The climate also must be equally indulgent, for, in too warm a region, the mind is relaxed into languors, and by the opposite excess, is chilled into torpid inactivity.

These are the principal advantages which tend to the improvement of learning. Encouragement from the Great is useful in preventing its decline.

THESE

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THOSE who behold the phænomena of nature, and content themselves with the view without enquiring into their causes, are perhaps wiser than is generally imagined. In this manner our rude ancestors were acquainted with facts, and Poetry, which helped the imagination, and the memory was thought the most proper vehicle for conveying their knowledge to posterity. It was the poet, who harmonized the ungrateful accents of his native dialect, who lifted it above common conversation, and shaped its rude combinations into order. From him the orator formed a style, and though poetry first rose out of prose, in turn, it gave birth to every prosaic excellence. Musical period, concise expression, and delicacy of sentiment, were all excellencies derived from the poet; in short, he not only preceded, but formed the orator, philosopher, and historian.

WHEN

OF POLITE LEARNING. 17

WHEN the observations of past ages were collected, philosophy began to examine their causes. She had numberless facts from which to draw proper inferences, and poetry had taught her the strongest expression to enforce them. The Greeks, (for we know little of the Egyptian learning) now exerted all their happy talents in the investigation of truth, and the production of beauty. Before this, the works of art were remarkable only for the vastness of design, and seemed the productions of giants, not of ordinary men; learning was another name for magic, or to give it its real appellation, imposture. But those improvers saw there was more excellence in captivating the judgment, than in raising a momentary astonishment: in their arts they imitated only such parts of nature, as might please in the representation; in the sciences,

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they cultivated such parts of knowledge, as it was every man's duty to be acquainted with. Unity, variety, and proportion, charmed in all their designs ; liberty, patriotism, and a subjection to the laws were, what all their true philosophers strove to inculcate. Thus learning was encouraged, protected, honoured, and in its turn, it adorned, strengthened and harmonized the community.

FROM being the disciple of Greece, Rome soon became its rival, and was as much esteemed for its improvements in the arts of peace, as feared for its achievements in those of war. The Romans understood, perhaps, better than their masters, the manner of blending art and science for their mutual improvement. By this means their philosophy acquired more grace, and their

their poetry more sentiment. They entirely banished that magical obscurity, which the Greeks first borrowed from other nations, and some part of which, their most admired writers thought proper still to retain. The learning of the Romans might justly be stiled, the truest refinement on common sense, it was therefore, a proper instrument in the hands of ambition. Their most powerful men, not only encouraged, but became themselves, the finest models of literary perfection. Thus the arts and sciences went on together, and reasoning proceeded no farther, than where experiment pointed out the way.

BUT as the operations of body are slow, those of the mind vigorous and active, as experiment is dilatory and painful, speculation quick and amusing, the spirit of philosophy

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loſophy being excited, the reaſoner, when deſtitute of experiment, had recourſe to theory, and gave up what was uſeful for refinement.

CRITICS, fophiſts, grammarians, rhetoricians, and commentators, now began to figure in the literary commonwealth. In the dawn of ſcience, ſuch are generally mo-deſt, and not entirely uſeleſs; their performances ſerve to mark the progreſs of learning, tho' they ſeldom contribute to its improvement. But as nothing but labour is required in making proficientſ, in their reſpective departments; ſo neither the ſatyr, nor the contempt of the wiſe, though So-crates was of the number, nor the laws le-velled at them by the ſtate, though Cato was in the legiſlature, could prevent their approaches. Poſſeſſed of all the advanta-ges of unfeeling dullneſs, laborious, inſen-
2 fible,

OF POLITE LEARNING. 21

sible, shameless and persevering, they still proceeded mending, and mending every work of genius, or to speak without irony, undermining all that was polite and useful. Libraries were crammed, but not enriched with their labours, while the fatigues of reading their explanatory comments was ten-fold that which might suffice for understanding the original. Their works effectually encreased our application, by professing to remove it.

AGAINST so obstinate and irrefragable an enemy, what could avail the unsupported fallies of genius, or the opposition of transitory resentment? In short, they conquered by persevering, claimed the right of dictating upon every work of taste, sentiment, or genius, and at last, when destitute of other employment, like the super-

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numerary

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numerary domestics of the great, made work for each other.

THEY now took upon them to teach poetry, to those who wanted genius, and the power of disputing, to those who knew nothing of the subject in debate. It was observed, how some of the most admired poets had copied nature. From these, they collected dry rules, dignified with long names, and such were obtruded upon the public for their improvement. Common sense would be apt to suggest, that the art might be studied to more advantage, rather by imitation than precept. It might suggest, that those rules were collected, not from nature, but a copy of nature, and would consequently give us still fainter resemblances of original beauty. It might still suggest, that explained wit, makes but a feeble impression, that the obser-

vations

OF POLITE LEARNING. 23

vations of others, are soon forgotten, those, made by ourselves, are permanent and useful. But, it seems, understandings of every size were to be mechanically instructed in poetry. If the reader was too dull to relish the beauties of Virgil, the comment of Servius was ready to brighten his imagination; if Terence could not raise him to a smile, Evantius was at hand, with a long-winded scholium to encrease his titillation. Such rules are calculated to make blockheads talk, but all the lemmata of the Lyceum are unable to give him feeling.

THEIR logical disputations seemed even to be the apotheosis of folly. In these the opponent had a right to affirm, whatever absurdity he thought proper. The defendant, though he saw the falshood almost by intuition, was not allowed to use his

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reason, but his art, in the debate. It was his business only to measure the assertion by one of his artificial instruments, and as it happened to accord, or disagree, he found himself qualified to support, or obliged to discontinue, his defence; which seldom, however, happened, till fatigue or anger terminated the enquiry.

But it would be endless to recount all the insect-like absurdities, which were hatched in the schools of those specious idlers; be it sufficient to say, that they increased as learning improved, but swarmed on its decline. It was then, that every work of taste was buried in long comments, every useful subject in morals, was distinguished away into casuistry, and doubt and subtilty characterized the learning of the age. Metrodorus, Valerius

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OF POLITE LEARNING. 25

us Probus, Aulus Gellius, Pedianus, Boethius, and an hundred others, to be acquainted with whom, might shew much reading, and but little judgment ; these, I say, made choice each of an author, and delivered all their load of learning on his back ; shame to our ancestors, many of their works have reached our times entire, while Tacitus himself has suffered mutilation.

In a word, the commonwealth of literature, was at last wholly overrun by these studious triflers. Men of real genius, were lost in the multitude, or, as in a world of fools, it were folly to aim at being an only exception, obliged to conform to every prevailing absurdity of the times. Original productions seldom appeared, and learning, as if grown superannuated, bestowed all its panegyric upon the
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the vigour of its youth, and turned enco-
mias upon its former atchievements.

It is to these, then, that the depravation of ancient polite learning, is principally to be ascribed. By them it was separated from common sense, and made the proper employment of speculative idlers. Men bred up among books, and seeing nature only by reflection, could do little, except hunt after perplexity and confusion. The public, therefore, with reason rejected learning, when thus rendered barren, though voluminous, for we may be assured, that the generality of mankind never lose a passion for letters, while they continue to be either amusing or useful.

It was such writers as these, that rendered learning unfit for uniting and strengthening

OF POLITE LEARNING. 27

ening civil society, or for promoting the views of ambition. True philosophy had kept the Græcian states cemented into one effective body, more than any law for that purpose ; and the Etrurian philosophy, which prevailed in the first ages of Rome, inspired those patriot virtues, which paved the way to universal empire. But by the labours of commentators, when philosophy became abstruse, or triflingly minute, when doubt was presented instead of knowledge, when the orator was taught to charm the multitude with the music of his periods, and pronounced a declamation, that might be sung as well as spoken, and often upon subjects wholly fictitious ; in such circumstances, learning was entirely unsuited to all the purposes of government, or the designs of the ambitious. As long as the sciences could influence the state, and its politics

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politics were strengthened by them, so long did the community give them countenance and protection. But the wiser part of mankind would not be imposed upon by unintelligible jargon, nor, like the knight in Pantagruel, swallow a chimera for a breakfast, though even cooked by Aristotle. As the philosopher grew useless in the state, he also became contemptible. In the times of Lucian, he was chiefly remarkable for his avarice, his impudence, and his beard.

UNDER the auspicious influence of genius, arts and sciences grew up together, and mutually illustrated each other. But when once Pedants became law-givers, the sciences began to want grace, and the polite arts solidity ; these grew crabbed and sowre, those meretricious and gawdy ; the philosopher became dif-

Of POLITE LEARNING. 29

disgustingly precise, and the poet, ever straining after grace, caught only finery.

These men also contributed to obstruct the progress of wisdom, by addicting their readers to one particular sect, or some favourite science. They generally carried on a petty traffic in some little creek; within that they busily plied about, and drove an insignificant trade; but never ventured out into the great ocean of knowledge, nor went beyond the bounds that chance, conceit, or laziness had first prescribed their enquiries. Their disciples, instead of aiming at being originals themselves, became imitators of that merit alone, which was constantly proposed for their admiration. In exercises of this kind, the most stupid are generally most successful; for there is not
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in nature, a more imitative animal than a dunce.

FROM hence ancient learning may be distinguished into three periods. Its commencement, or the age of poets ; its maturity, or the age of philosophers ; and its decline, or the age of critics. In the commencement of learning, commentators were very few, but might have, in some respects, been useful. In its maturity, their assistance must necessarily become obnoxious, yet, as if the nearer we approached perfection, the more we stood in need of their directions, in this period they began to grow numerous. But when polite learning was no more, then it was those literary lawgivers made the most formidable appearance. *Corruptissima republica, plurimæ leges.* TACIT.

CHAP. III.

A view of the obscure ages:

WHATEVER the skill of any country may be in the sciences, it is from its excellence in polite learning alone, it must expect a character from posterity. The poet and the historian, are they who diffuse a lustre upon the age, and the philosopher scarce acquires any applause, unless his character be introduced to the vulgar by their mediation.

THE obscure ages which succeeded the decline of the Roman empire, are a striking instance of the truth of this assertion. Whatever period of those ill-fated times we happen to turn to, we shall perceive more skill in the sciences among the professors

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feffors of them, more abstruse and deeper enquiry into every philosophical subject, and a greater shew of subtilty and close reasoning, than in the most enlightened ages of all antiquity. But their writings were mere speculative amusements, and all their researches exhausted upon trifles. Unskilled in the arts of adorning their knowlege, or adapting it to common sense, their voluminous productions rest peacefully in our libraries, or at best, are enquired after from motives of curiosity, and not of learning, not by the scholar, but the virtuoso.

I AM not insensible, that several late French historians, have exhibited the obscure ages in a very different light ; they have represented them, as utterly ignorant both of arts and sciences, buried in the profoundest darkness, or only illuminated with

Of POLITE LEARNING. 33

with a feeble gleam, which, like an expiring taper, rose and sunk by intervals. Such assertions, however, though they serve to help out the declaimer, should be cautiously admitted by the historian. The tenth century is particularly distinguished by posterity, with the appellation of obscure. Yet even in this, the reader's memory may possibly suggest the names of some, whose works, still preserved, discover a most extensive erudition, tho' rendered almost useless by affectation and obscurity. A few of their names and writings may be mentioned, which will serve at once to confirm what I assert, and give the reader an idea of what kind of learning an age declining into obscurity chiefly chuses to cultivate.

ABOUT the tenth century, flourished Leo the philosopher. We have seven volumes

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folio

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folio of his collections of laws, published at Paris, 1647. He wrote upon the art military, and understood also astronomy, and judicial astrology. He was seven times more voluminous than Plato.

SOLOMON, the German, wrote a most elegant dictionary of the Latin tongue, still preserved in the university of Louvain; Pantaleon, in the lives of his illustrious countrymen, speaks of it in the warmest strains of rapture. Dictionary writing was, at that time, much in fashion.

CONSTANTINE Porphyriogeneta, a man universally skilled in the sciences. His tracts on the administration of an empire, on tactics, on laws, &c. &c. were published some years since at Leyden. His court, for he was emperor of the east, was re-
forted

sorted to by the learned from all parts of the world.

LUITPRANDUS, a most voluminous historian, particularly famous for the history of his own times. In this he shews himself a perfect *matter of fact man*, but, like some moderns, who only value themselves on the same qualification, he was a most notorious fabulist. The compliments paid him as a writer, are said to exceed even his own voluminous productions. I cannot pass over one of a latter date made him by a German divine. *Luitprandus nunquam Luitprando dissimilis*. In English, None but himself could be his parallel.

ALFRIC composed several grammars and dictionaries still preserved among the curious.

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POPE Sylvester the eleventh, wrote a treatise on the sphere, on arithmetic, and geometry, published some years since at Paris.

MICHAEL Psellus lived in this age, whose books in the sciences, I will not scruple to assert, contain more learning than those of any one of the earlier ages of antiquity : his erudition was indeed amazing, and he was as voluminous as he was learned. The character given him by Al-latius has, perhaps, more truth in it than will be granted by those who have seen none of his productions. There was, says he, no science with which he was unacquainted, none which he did not write something upon, and none which he did not leave better than he found it. To mention his works, would be endless.

His

OF POLITE LEARNING. 37

His commentaries on Aristotle alone amount to three folios.

BERTHOLDUS Teutonicus, a very voluminous historian. He was a politician, and wrote against the government; but most of his writings, though not all, are lost.

CONSTANTINUS AFER, a philosopher and physician. We have remaining but two volumes folio of his philological performances. However, the historian, who prefixes the life of the author to his works, says, that he wrote many more, as he kept on writing during the course of a long life; and when he had thus compiled more than any man that ever went before him, he fell asleep. *In domino obdormivit.*

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LAMBERTUS published an universal history about this time, which has been printed at Francfort in folio. An universal history in one folio ! If he had consulted with his bookseller, he would have spun it out to ten at least ; but Lambertus might have had too much modesty.

OLYMPIODORUS published commentaries upon Plato. Doctor Foster, in his late edition of the select dialogues of that philosopher, has often taken occasion to quote him, and mentions him with honour.

By this time, the reader perceives the spirit of learning, which at that time prevailed. The ignorance of the age was not owing to a dislike of knowledge, but a false standard of taste was erected, and a wrong direction given to philosophical
5 enquiry.

OF POLITE LEARNING. 39

enquiry. It was the fashion of the day to consult books, not nature, and to evaporate in a folio, the spirit that could scarce have sufficed for an epigram. The most barbarous times had men of learning, if commentators, compilers, polemic divines, and intricate metaphysicians, deserved the title.

I HAVE mentioned but a very inconsiderable number of the writers in this age of obscurity. The multiplicity of their publications can, at least, equal those of any similar period of the most polite antiquity. As, therefore, the writers of those times are almost entirely forgotten, we may infer, that the number of publications alone will never secure any age whatsoever from oblivion. Nor can printing, contrary to what Mr. Baumelle has

D 4 remarked,

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remarked, prevent literary decline for the future, since it only encreases the number of books, without advancing their intrinsic merit.

CHAP.

CHAP. IV.

*A parallel between the rise and decline of
ancient and modern learning.*

FEW subjects have been more frequently and warmly debated, than the comparative superiority of the ancients and moderns. It is unaccountable how a dispute, so trifling, could be contested with so much virulence. A dispute of this nature, could have no other consequences, if decided, but to teach young writers to despise the one side or the other. A dispute, therefore, which, if determined, might tend rather to prejudice our taste, than improve it, should have been argued with good nature, as it could not with success. For mere critics to be guilty of such scholastic rage, is not uncommon,

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common, but for men of the first rank of fame to be delinquent also, is, I own, surprizing.

THE reflecting reader need scarcely be informed, that this contested excellence can be decided in favour of neither. They have both copied from different originals, described the manners of different ages, have exhibited nature as they found her, and both are excellent in separate imitations. Homer describes his Gods as his countrymen believed them. Virgil, in a more enlightened age, describes his with a greater degree of respect; and Milton still rises infinitely above either. The machinery of Homer is best adapted to an unenlightened idolator; that of the Roman poet, to a more refined heathen; and that of Milton, to a reader illuminated by revelation.

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velation. Had Homer wrote like Milton, his countrymen would have despised him ; had Milton adopted the theology of the ancient bard, he had been truly ridiculous. Again, should I depreciate Plautus for not enlivening his pieces with the characters of a coquet, or a marquis, so humourous in modern comedy ; or Moliere, for not introducing a legal bawd, or a parasitical boaster, so highly finished in the Roman poet ; my censure in either case would be as absurd as his, who should dislike a geographer for not introducing more rivers, or promontories, into a country, than nature had given it ; or the natural historian, for not enlivening his description of a dead landscape with a torrent, a cataract, or a volcano.

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THE parallel between antiquity and ourselves can therefore be managed to advantage only by comparing the rise and progress of ancient and modern learning together, so that being appriz'd of the causes of corruption in one, we may be upon our guard against any similar depravations in the other.

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

Of the present state of polite learning in Italy.

DA N T E, who wrote in the 13th century, was the first who attempted to bring learning from the cloister into the community, and paint human nature in a language adapted to modern manners. He addressed a barbarous people in a method suited to their apprehensions; united purgatory and the river Styx, St. Peter and Virgil, heaven and hell together, and shews a strange mixture of good sense and absurdity. The truth is, he owes most of his reputation to the obscurity of the times in which he liv'd. As in the land of Benin a man may pass for a prodigy of parts who can read, so in an age of barbarity a small degree of excellence ensures success. Be it his greatest merit
therefore

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therefore to have lifted up the standard of nature, in spite of all the opposition and the persecution he received from cotemporary criticism. To this standard every succeeding genius resorted; the germ of every art and science began to unfold, and to imitate nature was found to be the surest way of imitating antiquity. In a century or two after, modern Italy might justly boast of rivalling ancient Rome; equal in some branches of polite learning, and not far surpassed in others.

THEY soon however fell from emulating the wonders of antiquity into simple admiration. As if the word had been given when Vida and Tasso wrote on the arts of poetry, the whole swarm of critics was up; the Speroni's of the age attempted to be awkwardly merry; and the virtuosi and the Nascotti
fat

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fat upon the merits of every contemporary performance. After the age of Clement VII. the Italians seem'd to think that there was more merit in praising or censuring well, than in writing well; almost every subsequent performance being designed rather to shew the excellence of their taste than their genius.

BUT while I describe Italy as thus fallen from her former excellence, I cannot restrain the pleasure of mentioning one or two poets who seem born to redeem the honour of their country. Metastasio has restored nature in all her beauteous simplicity: no poet ever painted more conformably to truth, nor is there any whose characters speak a more heart-felt passion. His language also, if a foreigner may be allowed to determine, excels even that of Tasso, and his scenery is infinitely

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infinitely superior. Maffei is the first who has introduced a tragedy among his country-men without a love-plot. Perhaps the Sampson of Milton, and the Athalia of Racine, might have been his guides in such an attempt. Yet he seems as much inferior to either as a poet, as the subject of his Merope is more happily chosen.

Two poets, however, in an age are not sufficient to revive the splendor of decaying genius ; nor should we consider the few as the national standard, by which to characterize the many. Our measures of literary reputation must be taken rather from that numerous class of men who, placed above the vulgar, are yet beneath the great, and who confer fame on others without receiving any portion of it themselves.

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IN Italy, then, we shall no where find a stronger passion for art or science, yet no country making more feeble efforts to promote either. The Virtuosi and Filosofi seem to have divided the Encyclopedia between each other. Both inviolably attach'd to their respective pursuits, and from an opposition of character, each holding the other in the most sovereign contempt. The Virtuosi professed critics of beauty in the works of art, judge of medals by the smell, and the merit of a picture by feeling. In statuary hang over a fragment with the most ardent gaze of admiration, tho' wanting the head and the other extremities, if dug from a ruin the *Torse* becomes inestimable. An unintelligible monument of Etruscan barbarity cannot be sufficiently prized; and any thing from Herculanean becomes rapturous. When the intellectual taste is thus decayed,

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its relishes become false, and, like that of sense, nothing will satisfy, but what is best suited to palliate or feed the disease.

POETRY is no longer among them the imitation of what we see, but of what a visionary might wish. The zephyr breathes the most exquisite perfume, the trees wear eternal verdure ; sauns, and dryads, and hamadryads, stand ready to fan the sultry shepherdes, who has forgot indeed the prettinesses, with which former Italian shepherdeses have been reproached, but is so simple and innocent, as often to have no meaning. Happy country, where the pastoral age begins to revive ! Where the wits even of Rome are united into a rural groupe of nymphs and swains, under the appellation of modern Arcadians. Where in the midst of porticos, processions, and cavalcades,

3 abbes

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abbes turn'd into shepherds, and shepherdesses without sheep, indulge their innocent *divertimenti*. Perhaps, while I am writing, a shepherdess of threescore is listening to the pastoral tale of a French abbe; a warm imagination might paint her in all the splendor of ripened beauty, reclined on a paste-board rock; might fancy her lover, with looks inexpressibly tender, ravishing a kiss from the snowy softness of one of her hands, while the other holds a crook according to pastoral decorum. Amidst such frippery as this, there was no place for friendless Metastasio; he has left Italy, and the genius of nature seems to have left it with him.

THE Filosofi are entirely different from the former. As those pretend to have

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got their knowledge from conversing with the living and polite. so these boast of having theirs from books and study. Bred up all their lives in colleges, they have there learned to think in track, servilely to follow the leader of their sect, and only to adopt such opinions, as their universities, or the inquisition, are pleased to allow. By this means, they are behind the rest of Europe, in several modern improvements. Afraid to think for themselves ; and universities seldom admit opinions as true, till universally received among the rest of mankind. In short, were I to personize my ideas of learning in this country, I would either represent it in the tawdry habits of the stage, or else in the more homely guise of bearded school-philosophy.

THE

OF POLITE LEARNING. 53

THE Germans early discovered a passion for polite literature ; but unhappily, like conquerors, who invading the dominions of others, leave their own to desolation, instead of studying the German tongue, they wrote in Latin ; thus, while they cultivated an obsolete language, and vainly laboured to apply it to modern customs, they neglected their own. At the same time, they began also, by being commentators, and tho' they have given many instances of their industry, they have scarce afforded any of genius. If criticism could have improved the taste of a people, the Germans would have been the most polite nation alive. We shall no where behold the learned wear a more important appearance than here ; no where more dignified with professorships, or dressed out in the fopperies of scholastic finery. However, they seem to earn all the honours of this

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kind they enjoy. Their assiduity is unparalleled ; and did the learned of this country employ half those hours on study, which they bestow on reading, we might be induced to pity, as well as praise, their painful preheminance. But guilty of a fault, too common to great readers, they write through volumes, while they do not think through a page. Never fatigued themselves, they think the reader can never be weary ; so they drone on, saying all that can be said on the subject, not selecting what may be advanced to the purpose. Were angels to write books, they would never write folios.

But let the Germans have their due ; if they are often a little dull, no nation alive assumes a more laudable solemnity, or better understands all the little decorums
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of stupidity. Let the discourse of a professor run on never so heavily, it cannot be irksome to his dosing pupils, who frequently lend him their sympathetic nods of approbation. I have sometimes attended their disputes at gradation. On this occasion, they often dispense with learned gravity, and seem really all alive. The disputes are managed between the followers of Cartesius, whose exploded system they call the new philosophy, and those of Aristotle. Though both parties are wrong, they argue with an obstinacy worthy the cause of truth; Nego, Probo, and Distinguo, grow loud. The disputants become warm, the moderator cannot be heard, the audience take part in the debate, till at last, the whole hall buzzes with erroneous philosophy.

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THERE are, it is true, several societies in this country, which are chiefly calculated to promote natural knowledge. The elector of Hanover has established one at Gottingen, at an expence of not less than an hundred thousand pound. This university has already pickled monsters, and dissected live puppies without number. Their transactions of this kind have been published in the learned world at proper intervals, since their institution ; and will, it is hoped, one day give them a just reputation. Had the fourth part of the immense sum above mentioned, been given in proper rewards to genius, in some neighbouring countries, it would have rendered the name of the donor immortal, and added to the real interests of society.

BUT

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BUT let me cease from censure, since I have here so fine an opportunity of praise. Even in the midst of Germany, true learning has found an assylum, and taste, and genius, have been patronized by a prince, who, in the humblest station, had been the first of mankind. The society established by the king of Prussia at Berlin, is one of the finest literary institutions that any age or nation has produced. This academy comprehends all the sciences under four different classes; and although the object of each is different, and admits of being separately treated, yet these classes mutually influence the progress of each other, and concur in the same general design. Experimental philosophy, mathematics, metaphysics, and polite literature, are here carried on together, and mutually illustrate, and strengthen, and adorn each other.

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other. The members are not collected from among the students of some obscure seminary, or the wits of a metropolis, but chosen from all the literati of Europe, supported by the bounty, and ornamented by the productions of their royal founder. We can easily discern, how much such an institution excels any other now subsisting. One fundamental error among societies of this kind, is their addicting themselves to one branch of science, or some particular part of polite learning. Thus, in Germany, there are no where so many establishments of this nature; but as they generally profess the promotion of natural or medical knowledge, he who reads their Acta, will only find an obscure *far-rago* of experiments, most frequently terminated by no resulting *phænomena*. To make experiments is, I own, the only way
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to promote natural knowledge ; but to treasure up every unsuccessful enquiry into nature, or to communicate every experiment without conclusion, is not to promote science, but confuse it ; not to lift learning from obscurity, but with additional weight to oppress it. Had the members of these societies enlarged their plans, and taken in art as well as science, one part of knowledge would have repressed any faulty luxuriance in the other, and all would have mutually assisted each others promotion.

ADD to this, the society which, with a contempt of all collateral assistance, admits of members skilled in one science only, whatever their diligence, or labour may be, will lose much time in the discovery of such truths as are well known already to the learned

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learned in a different line, consequently their progress must be slow in gaining a proper eminence, from which to view their subject, and their strength will be exhausted in attaining the station from whence they should have set out. With regard to the Royal Society of London, the greatest, perhaps, the oldest institution of the kind, had it widened the basis of its institution, though they might not have propagated more discoveries, at least, they would have delivered them in a more pleasing and compendious form. They would have been hitherto free from the contempt of the ill-natured, and the raillery of the wit, for which, even candour must allow, there is but too much foundation.

THE Berlin academy is subject to none of the inconveniencies above mentioned, but
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every one of its individuals is in a capacity of deriving more from the common stock than he contributes to it, while each academician serves as a check upon the rest of his fellows. Yet, perhaps, even this fine institution will soon decay. As it rose, so it will probably decline, with its great encourager. The society, if I may so speak, is artificially supported ; the introduction of foreigners of learning was right ; but in adopting a foreign language also, I mean the French, in which all the transactions are to be published, and questions debated ; in this there might have been an error. As I have already hinted, the language of the natives of every country, should be also the language of its polite learning, I may be supposed to carry the thought too far, when I say, that to figure in polite learning, every
country

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country should make their own language, from their own manners; nor will they ever succeed by introducing that of another, which has been formed from manners which are different. Besides, an academy composed of foreigners, must still be recruited from abroad, unless all the natives of the country, to which it belongs, are in a capacity to become candidates for its honours, or rewards. While France continues to supply Berlin, polite learning will flourish; when royal favour is withdrawn, learning will return to its natural country.

HOLLAND, at first view, appears to have some pretensions to polite learning. It may be regarded as the great emporium, not less of literature, than of every commodity. Here, though destitute of what
may

OF POLITE LEARNING. 63

may be properly called a language of their own, all the languages are understood, cultivated and spoken. All useful inventions in arts, and new discoveries in science, are published here almost as soon as at the places which first produced them. Its individuals have the same faults, however, with the Germans, of making more use of their memory, than their judgment. The chief employment of their literati is to criticise, or answer the new performances which appear elsewhere.

A DEARTH of wit in France or England, naturally produces a scarcity in Holland. What Ovid says of Eccho, may be applied here, *Nec loqui prius ipsa didicit nec reticere loquenti*. They wait till something new comes out from others, examine its merits, and reject it, or make it reverberate through the rest of Europe.

AFTER

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AFTER all, I know not whether they should be allowed any national character for polite learning. All their taste is derived to them from neighbouring nations, and that in a language not their own. They somewhat resemble their brokers, who trade for immense sums, without having any capital.

THE other countries of Europe may be considered as immersed in ignorance, or making but feeble efforts to rise. Spain has long fallen from amazing Europe with her wit, to amusing them with the greatness of her catholic credulity. Rome considers her as the most favourite of all her children, and school-divinity still reigns there in triumph. In spite of all attempts of the marquis D'ensanada, who
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saw with regret, the barbarity of his countrymen, and bravely offered to oppose it, by introducing new systems of learning, and suppressing the seminaries of monastic ignorance, in spite of the ingenuity of Padré Frejo, whose book of vulgar errors so finely exposes the monkish stupidity of the times, the religious have prevailed. Enfanada has been banished, and now lives in exile ; Frejo has incurred the hatred and contempt of every bigot, whose errors he has attempted to oppose, and feels, no doubt, the unremitting displeasure of the priesthood. Persecution is a tribute, the Great must ever pay for pre-eminence.

It is a little extraordinary, however, why Spain, whose genius is naturally fine, should be so much behind the rest of Europe, in this particular ; or why school divinity should

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hold its ground there, for near 600 years. The reason, perhaps, may be, that philosophical opinions, tho' in themselves transient, acquire stability in proportion, as they are connected with religion, and philosophy and religion have no where been so closely united as here.

SWEDEN has of late made some attempts in polite learning, in its own language. Count Tessin's instructions to the prince his pupil, are no bad beginning. If the muses can fix their residence so far northward, perhaps, no country bids so fair for their reception. They have, I am told, a language rude, but energetic ; if so, it will bear a polish ; they have also a jealous sense of liberty, and that strength of thinking, peculiar to northern climates, without its attendant ferocity. They will certainly in time,
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OF POLITE LEARNING. 67

produce somewhat great, if their intestine divisions do not unhappily prevent them.

THE history of polite learning in Denmark, may be comprized in the life of one single man ; it rose and fell with the late famous baron Holberg. This was, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary personages that has done honour to the present century. His being the son of a private centinel, did not abate the ardour of his ambition, for he learned to read, though without a master. Upon the death of his father, being left entirely destitute, he was involved in all that distress, which is common among the poor, and of which the Great have scarce any idea. However, though only a boy of nine years old, he still persisted in pursuing his studies, travelled about from school to school,

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and begg'd his learning and his bread. When at the age of seventeen, instead of applying himself to any of the lower occupations, which seem best adapted to such circumstances, he was resolved to travel for improvement, from Norway the place of his birth, to Copenhagen the capital city of Denmark. He lived here by teaching French, at the same time, avoiding no opportunity of improvement, that his scanty funds could permit. But his ambition was not to be restrained, or his thirst of knowledge satisfied, until he had seen the world. Without money, recommendations or friends, he undertook to set out upon his travels, and make the tour of Europe on foot. A good voice, and a trifling skill in musick, were the only finances he had to support an undertaking so extensive; so he travelled by day, and at night sung at the doors

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doors of peasants houses, to get himself a lodging. In this manner, young Holberg passed thro' France, Germany, and Holland, and coming over to England, took up his residence for two years in the university of Oxford. Here, he subsisted by teaching French and music, and wrote his universal history, his earliest, but worst performance. Furnished with all the learning of Europe, he at last thought proper to return to Copenhagen, where his ingenious productions quickly gained him that favour he deserved. He composed not less than 18 comedies; those in his own language are said to excel, and those which are wrote in French have peculiar merit. He was honoured with nobility, and enriched by the bounty of the king; so that a life begun in contempt and penury, ended in opulence and esteem.

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THUS we see, in what a low state polite learning is in the countries I have mentioned. Though the sketch I have drawn be general, yet it was, for the most part, taken upon the spot, nor are the assertions hazarded at random. I am sensible, however, of the impropriety of national reflection; and did not truth bias me more than inclination in this particular, I should, instead of the account already given, have presented the reader with a panegyric on many of the individuals of every country, whose merits deserve the warmest strains of praise. Apostol Zeno, Muratori, and Stay, in Italy; Haller, Klopstock, and Rabner, in Germany; Muschenbrook, and Gaubius, in Holland; all deserve the highest applause. But it was my design, rather to give an idea of the spirit of learning in these countries,

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countries, than a dry catalogue of authors names and writings.

BUT, let me cease a moment from considering this worthy, however erroneous, part of mankind, on that side alone, on which they are exposed to censure, and survey them, as the friends of man.

WHILE the great, and the avaricious of this world, are contriving means to aggravate national hatred ; and, perhaps, fonder of satisfying vanity than justice, are willing to make the world uneasy, because themselves are so ; these harmless instruments of peace, united by one bond, pursuing one design, spend their labour, and their lives, in making their fellow-creatures happy, and repairing the breaches caused by ambition. In this
F 4 light,

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light the meanest philosopher, though all his possessions are his lamp or his cell, is more truly valuable than he, whose name echoes to the shout of the million, and who stands in all the glare of admiration. In this light, though poverty and contemptuous neglect are all the wages of his good will from mankind, yet the rectitude of his intention is an ample recompence, and self applause for the present, and the alluring prospect of fame for futurity reward his labours. The perspective of life brightens, when terminated by an object so charming. Every intermediate image of want, banishment, or sorrow, receives a lustre from its distant influence. With this in view, the patriot, philosopher, and poet, have often looked with calmness on disgrace and famine, and rested on their straw with cheerful

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ful serenity. Even the last terrors of departing nature abate of their severity, and look kindly on him, who considers his sufferings as a passport to immortality, and lays his sorrows on the bed of fame,

CHAP.

C H A P. VI.

A parallel between the decline of ancient and modern learning.

THE similitude between the rise and decline of ancient and modern learning is so obvious, that it scarcely requires an illustration. We may have seen, that wherever the poet was permitted to improve his native language, polite learning flourished; where the critic undertook the same task, it never rose to any degree of perfection. We have seen the genius of every country make more feeble advances to excellence in proportion, as the number of critics was great, and learning become more loquacious as it was less improving.

AN encrease of criticism is, however, the natural consequence of learning's becoming

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coming universal. There are proportionably a greater number of learned men without any natural genius in every country, when the love of science is diffused among all ranks of people, than in its incipient state, when this passion influences only the ambitious; but it is ten to one, that every man of learning without genius becomes a critic, therefore critics must be proportionably more numerous when learning is diffus'd through all the degrees of mankind.

If critics, therefore, or *all such as judge by rule, and not by feelings*, must necessarily become more numerous in the maturity of learning, than in its beginning; and if they have been always found by experience to injure it; I may be permitted to call criticism, the natural decay of politeness. A decay which may be deplored, but cannot be prevented,

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ed, since it encreases as the love of learning is diffused. It cannot be remedied by rule, for every prescription encreases the disease, since the man who writes against the critics, is obliged to add himself to the number. Other depravations in the republic of letters, such as affectation in some popular writer, leading others into vicious imitation ; political struggles in the state ; a depravity of morals among the people ; ill directed encouragement, or no encouragement from the Great, these have been often found to co-operate in the decline of literature ; and it has sometimes declined, as in modern Italy, without them ; but an encrease of criticism has always portended a decay. Of all misfortunes, therefore, in the commonwealth of letters, this of judging from rule, and not from feeling, is the most severe. At such a tribunal, no work of original

ginal merit can please. Sublimity, if carried to an exalted height, approaches burlesque, and humour sinks into vulgarity; the person who cannot feel, may ridicule both as such, and bring rules to corroborate his assertion. There is, in short, no excellence in writing, that such judges may not place among the neighbouring defects. Rules render the reader more difficult to be pleased, and abridge the author's power of pleasing.

IF we turn to England and France, we shall perceive evident symptoms of this natural decay beginning to appear. Upon a moderate calculation, there seems to be as many volumes of criticism published in those countries, as of all other kinds of polite erudition united. Paris sends forth not less than four literary journals every month, the *Année-littéraire*, and the *Fuille*
by

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by Freron, the *Journal Etrangere* by the Chevalier D'Arc, and *Le Mercure* by Marmontel. We have two literary reviews in London, with critical news-papers and magazines without number. The compilers of these resemble the commoners of Rome, they are all for levelling property, not by encreasing their own, but by diminishing that of others. The man who has any good nature in his disposition must, however, be somewhat displeased to see distinguished reputations often the sport of ignorance. To see by one false pleafantry, the future peace of a worthy man's life disturbed, and this only because he has unsuccessfully attempted to instruct or amuse us. Tho' ill nature is far from being wit, yet it is generally laughed at as such. The critic enjoys the triumph, and ascribes to his parts, what is only due to his effrontery.

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IF there be any, however, among these writers, who being bred gentlemen and scholars, are obliged to have recourse to such an employment for subsistence, I wish them one more suited to their inclinations ; but for such who, wholly destitute of education and genius, indent to the press, and turn mere book-makers, they deserve the severest censure. These add to the sin of criticism the sin of ignorance also. Their trade is a bad one, and they are bad workmen in the trade.

WHEN I consider those industrious men as indebted to the works of other authors for a precarious subsistence, when I see them coming down at stated intervals to rummage the bookseller's compter for materials to work upon ; it raises a smile, tho' mixed with pity. It reminds me of an
animal

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animal called by naturalists the soldier. This little creature, says the historian, is passionately fond of a shell, but not being supplied with one by nature, has recourse to the deserted shell of some other. I have seen these harmless reptiles, continues he, come down once a-year from the mountains, rank and file, cover the whole shoar and ply busily about, each in quest of a shell to please it. Nothing can be more amusing than their industry upon this occasion. One shell is too big, another too little, they enter and keep possession sometimes for a good while until one is, at last, found entirely to please. When all are thus properly equipped, they march up again to the mountains, and live in their new acquisition, till under a new necessity of changing.

BVT

OF POLITE LEARNING. 81

BUT to leave this subject, let us proceed to consider those corruptions which admit of correction. Let us examine the merits of modern learning in England and in France; where, though it may be on the decline, yet it is still capable of retrieving much of its former splendor. In other places, a decay has already taken place, here it is only beginning. To attempt the amendment of Italy or Germany, would be only like the application of remedies to a part mortified, but here, still there is life, and there is hope.

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CHAP.

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CHAP. VII.

*The polite learning of England and France
incapable of comparison.*

W HATEVER preference the vulgar of every nation may think due to their own in particular, the learned who look beyond the bounds of national prejudice, and are citizens of the world, seem unanimous in regarding the English and French, as the principal literary supporters of the present age. Their emulation in learning as well as in power, have divided the wits not less than the armies of Europe. *A niuno è nascosto, says a modern writer, come la Francia e l'Inghilterra sono rivali nella politica, nel commercio, nella gloria delle armi e delle lettere.*

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OF POLITE LEARNING. 83

THIS acknowledged superiority was, however, no easy conquest over that national pride, with which every country is more or less tinctured. Every part of Europe was at one time or another candidates for this preheminance, which though they had not the good fortune to obtain, their attempts served in a subordinate degree to assist and refine the taste of their cotemporaries. Thus Spain exhibited fine examples of humour ; Italy of delicacy ; and Holland of freedom in enquiry. But to blend these excellencies and arrive at perfection, seemed reserved for the poets and philosophers of England and France in the illustrious reigns of Queen Anne and Lewis XIV. The writers of that period, not only did honour to their respective countries, but even to human nature. Like stars lost in each others brightness, tho'

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no single writer attracts our attention alone, yet their conjunction diffuses such brightness upon the age, as will give the minutest actions of those two reigns an importance, which the revolutions of empire will want that were transacted in greater obscurity.

YET that excellence which now excites the admiration of Europe, served at that period of which I am speaking, only to promote envy in the respective writers of those two countries. They both took every method to depreciate the merit of each other; the French seldom mentioned the English but with disrespect, put themselves foremost in every literary contest, and to leave the English no colour of competition, placed the Italians in the second rank. The English, on the other hand, regarded the French as triflers, accused the
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flymſy texture of their ſtile, and the falſe brilliancy of their ſentiments. Yet, while each thus loaded the other with contempt, it ſeemed as if done with a view of having their mutual plagiariſm paſs with leſs ſuſpicion. In works of entertainment, we borrowed from the French unſparingly; and they plundered our ſerious performances with as little compunction. Europe, however, regarded the conteſt with impartiality, and the debate ſeems at laſt determined. Their writings are allowed to have more taſte, ours more truth. We are allowed the honour of ſtriking out ſentiments, they of dreſſing them in the moſt pleaſing form. If we have produc'd reaſoners who have refin'd mankind, it is by means of French tranſlations and abſtracts that they are generally known in Europe. Their language has prevailed, and our philoſophy,

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AND this, indeed, is all the English had a right to expect in a contest of this nature, nor have they any just reason to regret not being chosen supreme in taste as well as truth ; for if we only consider, how different our manners are from those of every other nation on the continent ; how little we are visited by travellers of discernment ; how ignorant our neighbours are of our various absurdities and humours ; if we consider this, it cannot be expected, that our works of taste, which imitate our peculiar manners, can please those that are unacquainted with the originals themselves. Though our descriptions and characters are drawn from nature, yet they may appear exaggerated, or faintly copied, to those, who, unacquainted with the peculiarities of our island, have

no

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no standard by which to make the comparison.

THE French are much more fortunate than us in this particular. An universal sameness of character appears to spread itself over the whole continent, particularly the fools and coxcombs of every country abroad seem almost cast in the same mold. The battered beau, who affects the boy at threescore, or the petit maitre, who would be a man at fifteen, are characters which may be seen in every coffee-house out of England. The French pictures therefore of life and manners are immediately allowed to be just, because foreigners are acquainted with the models from whence they are copied. The Marquis of Moliere strikes all Europe. Sir

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John

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John Falstaff, with all the merry men of Eastcheap, are entirely of England, and please the English alone.

LET us then be satisfied, the world has allowed us superiority in the strength and justness of our sentiments, for it hath truth as a standard by which to compare them ; we are placed inferior in regard to taste, for in this there is no standard to judge of our desert, our manners being unknown. Truth is a positive, taste a relative excellence. We may justly appeal from the sentence of our judges ; though we must do them the justice to own that their verdict has been impartial.

BUT it may be objected, that this is setting up a particular standard of taste in
every

every country ; this is removing that universal one, which has hitherto united the armies and enforced the commands of criticism ; by this reasoning the critics of one country, will not be proper guides to the writers of another ; Grecian or Roman rules will not be generally binding in France or England ; but the laws designed to improve our taste, by this reasoning, must be adapted to the genius of every people, as much as those enacted to promote morality.

WHAT I propose as objections, are really the sentiments I mean to prove, not to obviate. I must own it as my opinion, that if criticism be at all requisite to promote the interests of learning, its rules should be taken from among the inhabitants, and adapted to the genius and temper of the country it attempts to refine.

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fine. I must own it, though, perhaps, by this opinion's prevailing, many a scholium of the ancients, and many a folio of criticism translated from the French, now in repute among us, would infallibly sink into oblivion. English taste, like English liberty, should be restrained only by laws of its own promoting.

BUT to use argument as well as assertion, let us take a nearer view of what is called taste, examine its standard, see if foreign critics are just in setting up theirs as a model to us, or whether we be right in adopting their proffered improvements. As the disquisition, however, is dry, I shall study conciseness.

ALL objects affect us with pleasure one of these two ways, either by immediately
4 gratify-

OF POLITE LEARNING. 91

gratifying the senses with pleasing sensations, or by being thought in a secondary manner capable of making other objects contribute to this effect. The pleasures of immediate sensation are coeval with our senses, and, perhaps, most vivid in infancy; the secondary source of pleasure results from experience only, from considering the analogy of nature, or the capacity a part has to unite to an whole. The pleasures of the first sort, are derived from the beauty of the object, those of the second, from a consideration of its use. The first are natural, no art can encrease them without mending the organ which was to give them admission. The second are artificial, and continually altering, as whim, climate, or seasons direct. To illustrate my meaning. The beauty of a guinea, for instance, its regular figure, and shining colour, are equally obvious

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obvious to the senses in every country and climate, these qualities please the wildest savage as much as the most polished European ; as far as it affects the senses, the pleasure a guinea gives is therefore in every country the same.

BUT the consideration of the uses it can be turned to, are another source of pleasure, which is different in different countries. A native of Madagascar prefers to it a glass bead ; a native of Holland prefers it to every thing else. The pleasure then of its sensible qualities are every where the same ; those of its secondary qualities every where different. He, whom nature has furnished with the most vivid perceptions of beauty, and to whom experience has suggested the greatest number of uses, in the contemplation of any ob-

Of POLITE LEARNING. 93

object, may be said to receive the greatest pleasure that object is capable of affording. Thus the Barbarian finds some small pleasure in the contemplation of a guinea; the enlightened European who is acquainted with its uses, still more than him; the chymist, who besides this, knows the peculiar fixedness and malleability of the metal, most of all. This capacity of receiving pleasure, may be called Taste in the objects of nature. The polite arts in all their variety are only an imitation of nature. He then must excel in them, who is capable of inspiring us at once with the most vivid perceptions of beauty, and with the greatest number of experimental uses in any object described. But as the artist, to give vivid perceptions must be perspicuous and concise, and yet to exhibit usefulness requires minuteness,

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nuteness; here are two opposite qualities required in the writer, in one of which his imagination, in the other his reasoning faculty is every moment liable to offend; what has he in this case to guide him? Taste is, perhaps, his only director. *Taste in writing, is the exhibition of the greatest quantity of beauty and of use, that may be admitted into any description without counteracting each other.*

THE perfection of taste therefore proceeds from a knowledge of what is beautiful and useful. Criticism professes to encrease our taste. But our taste cannot be encreased with regard to beauty, because, as has been shewn, our perceptions of this kind cannot be encreased, but are most vivid in infancy. Criticism then can only improve our taste in the useful. But this,

OF POLITE LEARNING. 95

as was observed, is different in every climate and country ; what is useful in one climate being often noxious in another ; therefore criticism must understand the nature of the climate and country, &c. before it gives rules to direct Taste. In other words, every country should have a national system of criticism.

IN fact, nothing can be more absurd than rules to direct the taste of one country drawn from the manners of another. There may be some general marks in nature, by which all writers are to proceed ; these, however, are obvious and might as well have never been pointed out, but to trace the sources of our passions, to mark the evanescent boundaries between satiety and disgust, and how far elegance differs from finery, requires a thorough knowledge

lege of the people to whom the criticism is directed.

IF, for instance, the English be a people who look upon death as an incident no way terrible, but sometimes fly to it for refuge from the calamities of life, why should a Frenchman be disgusted at our bloody stage? there is nothing hideous in the representation to one of us, whatever there might be to him.

WE have long been characteriz'd as a nation of spleen, and our rivals on the continent as a land of levity. Ought they to be offended at the melancholly air which many of our modern poets assume, or ought we to be displeased with them for all their harmless trifling upon pin-cushions, parrots, and pretty faces. What is rational with us, becomes with them
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Of POLITE LEARNING. 97

formality ; and what is fancy, at Paris, is at London, phantastical. Critics should, therefore, imitate physicians, and consider every country as having a peculiar constitution, and consequently requiring a peculiar regimen,

H CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

The present state of polite learning in France.

THAT levity for which we are apt to despise the French, is probably the principal source of their happiness. An agreeable oblivion of past pleasures, a freedom from solicitude about future ones, and a poignant zest of every immediate enjoyment, if they be not philosophy, are at least excellent substitutes in its room. By this they are taught to regard the present period with admiration. The present manners, and the present conversation, surpass all that preceded; a Frenchman is as little displeased with every thing about him, as with his own person or existence.

THIS

OF POLITE LEARNING. 99

THIS agreeable enthusiasm, tinctures not only their manners, but their learning, and taste. While we with a despondence characteristic of our nation, are for removing back British excellence to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, our more happy rivals of the continent, cry up the writers of the present times with rapture, and regard the age of Lewis XV. as the true Augustan age of France.

THE truth is, their present writers have not fallen so far short of the merits of their ancestors, as ours have done. That self-sufficiency, now mentioned, may have been of service to them in this particular. By fancying themselves superior to their ancestors, they have been encouraged to enter the lists with confidence, and by not being dazzled at the splendor of ano-

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ther's

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ther's reputation, have sometimes had sagacity to mark out an unbeaten path to fame, for themselves.

OTHER causes also may be assigned, that their second growth of genius is still more vigorous than ours. Their encouragements to merit are more skilfully directed, the link of patronage and learning still continues unbroken. The French nobility have certainly a most pleasing way of satisfying the vanity of an author, without indulging his avarice. A man of literary merit, is sure of being caressed by the Great, though seldom enriched. His pension from the crown just supplies half a competence, and the sale of his labours, makes some small addition to his circumstances ; thus the author leads a life of splendid poverty, and seldom becomes

OF POLITE LEARNING. 101

comes wealthy or indolent enough, to discontinue an exertion of those abilities, by which he rose. With the English, it is different; our writers of rising merit are generally neglected; while the few of an established reputation, are overpaid by a luxurious affluence. The first encounter every hardship which generally attends upon aspiring indigence; the latter, enjoy the vulgar, and, perhaps, the more prudent satisfaction of putting riches in competition with fame. Those are often seen to spend their youth in want and obscurity; these are sometimes found to lead an old age of indolence and avarice. But such treatment must naturally be expected from a people, whose national character it is, to be slow and cautious in making friends, but violent in friendships once contracted. The English

H 3 nobility,

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nobility, in short, are often known to give greater rewards to genius than the French, who, however, are much more judicious in the application of their empty favours.

THE fair sex in France have also not a little contributed to prevent the decline of taste and literature, by expecting such qualifications in their admirers. A man of fashion at Paris, however contemptible we may think him here, must be acquainted with the reigning modes of philosophy as well as of dress, to be able to entertain his mistress agreeably. The charming pedants are not to be caught like some damsels to be seen in Holland, by dumb shew, by a squeeze of the hand, or the ogling of a broad eye : but must be pursued at once through all the labyrinths of the Newtonian system, the mazy metaphysics

OF POLITE LEARNING. 103

taphysics of Locke, and still more, the variations of female inclination. I have seen as bright a circle of beauty at the chymical lectures of Ruelle, as gracing the court at Versailles. Wisdom never appears so charming, as when graced and protected by beauty.

To these advantages may be added the reception of their language into the different courts of Europe. An author, who excels, is sure of having all the polite for admirers, and is encouraged to write by the pleasing expectation of universal fame. Added to this, those countries who can make nothing good in their own language, have lately begun to write in this, some of whose productions contribute to support the present literary reputation of France.

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THE age of Lewis the XIVth, notwithstanding these advantages, is still superior. It is indeed a misfortune for a fine writer to be born in a period so enlightened as ours. The harvest of wit is gathered in, and little is left for him, except to glean what others have thought unworthy their bringing away. Yet, there are still some among the French, who do honour to the age, and whose writings will be transmitted to posterity with an ample, though a subordinate share of fame: some of the most celebrated, are as follow ;

VOLTAIRE, whose voluminous, yet spirited productions, are too well known to require an elogy ; does he not resemble the champion mentioned by Xenophon, of great reputation in all the gymnastic exercises united, but inferior to each cham-

OF POLITE LEARNING. 105

champion singly, who excels only in one ?

MONTESQUIEU, a name equally deserving fame with the former. The Spirit of Laws is an instance, how much genius is able to lead learning. His system has been adopted by the literati; and yet is it not possible for opinions equally plausible to be formed upon opposite principles, if a genius like his, could be found to attempt such an undertaking? He seems more a poet than a philosopher.

ROUSSEAU of Geneva. A professed man-hater, or more properly speaking, a philosopher enraged with one half of mankind, because they unavoidably make the other half unhappy. Such sentiments are generally the result of much good nature, and little experience.

PYRON,

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PYRON, an author possessed of as much wit as any man alive, yet with as little prudence, to turn it to his own advantage. A comedy of his, called *La Metromanie*, is incomparably the best theatrical production, that has appeared of late in Europe. But I know not, whether I should most commend his genius, or censure his obscenity ; his ode a *Priape*, has justly excluded him from a place in the academy of *Belles Lettrés*. However, the good-natured *Montesquieu*, by his interest, procured the starving bard a trifling pension. His own epitaph was all the revenge he took upon the academy for being repulsed.

*Cy Git Pyron qui ne fut jamais rien
Pas même Accademicien.*

CRE-

OF POLITE LEARNING. 107

CREBILLON, junior. A writer of real merit, but guilty of the same indelicate faults with the former. Wit employed in dressing up obscenity, is like the art used in painting a corpse; it may be thus rendered tolerable to one sense, but fails not quickly to offend some other.

GRESSET, agreeable and easy. His comedy called the *Mechant*, and an humorous poem, entitled *Ver-vert*, have original merit. He was bred a jesuit, but his wit procured his dismissal from the society. This last work particularly, could expect no pardon from the Convent, being a fatyr against nunneries!

DALEMBERT, has united an extensive skill in scientific learning, with the most refined

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refined taste for the polite arts. His excellence in both, have procured him a seat in each academy.

DIDEROT, an elegant writer and subtil reasoner. He is the supposed author of the famous Thesis, which the abbé Prade sustained before the doctors of the Sorbonne. It was levelled against Christianity, and the Sorbonne too hastily gave it their sanction. They perceived its purport, however, when it was too late. The college was brought into some contempt, and the abbé obliged to take refuge at the court of Berlin.

THE marquis D'Argens attempts to add the character of a philosopher to the vices of a debauchée.

THE

OF POLITE LEARNING. 109

THE catalogue might be encreased with several other authors of merit, such as Marivaux, Le Franc, Saint Foix, Destouches, and Modonville, but let it suffice to say, that by these, the character of the present age is tolerably supported. Tho' their poets seldom rise to fine enthusiasm, they never sink into absurdity; though they fail to astonish, they are generally possessed of talents to please.

BUT altho' taste is still cultivated there with assiduity, I must not conceal those symptoms which seem manifestly tending to promote its decline. There is a fondness for scepticism, which runs through the works of some of their most applauded writers, and which the numerous class of their imitators have contributed to diffuse. Nothing can be a more certain sign, that
genius

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genius is in the wane, than its being obliged to fly to paradox to support it, and attempting to be erroneously agreeable. A man, who with all the impotence of wit, and all the eager desires of infidelity, writes against the religion of his country, may raise doubts, but will never give conviction; all he can do is to render society less happy than he found it. It was a fine manner, which the father of the late poet Saint Foix, took to reclaim his son from this juvenile error. The young poet had shut himself up for some time in his study, and his father, willing to know what had engaged his attention so closely, upon entering, found him busied in drawing up a new system of religion, and endeavouring to shew the absurdity of that already established. The old man knew by experience, that it was useless to endeavour
to

OF POLITE LEARNING. 111

to convince a vain young man by reason ; so only desired his company up stairs. When come into the father's apartment, he takes his son by the hand, and drawing back a curtain at one end of the room, discovered a crucifix exquisitely painted. ' My son, says he, you desire to
' change the religion of your country, be-
' hold the fate of an innovator.' The truth is, vanity is more apt to misguide men than false reasoning ; as some had rather be conspicuous in a mob, than unnoticed even in privy council, so others chuse rather to be foremost in the retinue of error, than follow in the train of truth, and prefer the applause of pert stupidity, to that approbation which virtue ever pays itself. What influence the conduct of such writers may have on the
morals

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morals of a people, is not my business to determine. Certain I am, that it has a manifest tendency to subvert the literary merits of the country in view. The change of religion in every nation, has hitherto produced barbarism and ignorance, and such will be probably its consequences in every future period. For when the laws, and the opinions of society, are made to clash, harmony is dissolved, and all the arts of peace unavoidably crushed in the encounter.

THE writers of this country have of late also fallen into a method of considering every part of art and science, as arising from simple principles. The success of Montesquieu, and one or two more, has induced all the subordinate ranks of genius
into

into vicious imitation. To this end they turn to our view that side of the subject, which contributes to support their hypothesis, while the objections are generally passed over in silence. Thus an universal system rises from a partial representation of the question, an Whole is concluded from a Part, a book appears entirely new, and the fancy-built fabric is stiled for a short time very ingenious. In this manner we have seen of late, almost every subject in morals, natural history, politics, œconomy, and commerce treated; subjects naturally proceeding on many principles; and some even opposite to each other, are all taught to proceed along the line of systematic simplicity, and continue like other agreeable falsehoods extremely pleasing, till they are detected.

I

I MUST

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I MUST still add another fault of a nature somewhat similar to the former. As those above mentioned are for contracting a single science into system, so those I am going to speak of are for drawing up a system of all the sciences united. Such undertakings as these are carried on by different writers cemented into one body, and concurring in the same design, by the mediation of a bookseller. From these inauspicious combinations, proceed those monsters of learning, the *Trevoux*, *Encyclopedie's*, and *Bibliotheques* of the age. In making these, men of every rank in literature are employed, wits and dunces contribute their share, and *Diderot*, as well as *Desmaretz*, are candidates for oblivion. The genius of the first, supplies the gale of favour; and the latter adds, the use-
ful

ful ballast of stupidity. By such means, the enormous mass heavily makes its way among the public, and to borrow a book-feller's phrase, the whole impression moves off. These great collections of learning, may serve to make us inwardly repine at our own ignorance, may serve when gilt and lettered, to adorn the lower shelves of a regular library ; but woe to the reader, who not daunted at the immense distance between one great pasteboard and the other, opens the volume and explores his way through a region so extensive, but barren of entertainment. No unexpected landscape there to delight the imagination ; no diversity of prospect to cheat the painful journey ; he sees the wide extended desert lie before him ; what is past only encreases his terror of what is to come.

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His course is not half finished, he looks behind him with affright, and forward with despair. Perseverance is at last overcome, and a night of oblivion lends its friendly aid to terminate the perplexity.

CHAP.

C H A P. IX.

Of learning in Great Britain.

TO acquire a character for learning among the English at present, it is necessary to know much more than is either important or useful. The absurd passion of being deemed profound, has done more injury to all kinds of science, than is generally imagined. Some thus exhaust their natural sagacity in exploring the intricacies of another man's thought, and have never found leisure to think for themselves; others have carried on learning from that stage, where the good sense of our ancestors thought it too minute or too speculative to instruct or amuse. By the industry of such, the sciences

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sciences which in themselves are easy of access, affright the learner with the severity of their appearance. He sees them surrounded with speculation and subtilty, placed there by their professors as if with a view of deterring his approach. From hence it happens, that the generality of readers fly from the scholar to the compiler, who offers them a more safe and speedy conveyance.

FROM this fault also arises that mutual contempt between the scholar and the man of the world, of which every day's experience furnisheth instances.

THE man of taste, however, stands neuter in this controversy, he seems placed in a middle station, between the world and the cell, between learning and common sense.

OF POLITE LEARNING. 119

ſenſe. He teaches the vulgar on what part of a character to lay the emphasis of praiſe, and the ſcholar where to point his application ſo as to deſerve it. By his means, even the philoſopher, acquires popular applauſe, and all that are truly great the admiration of poſterity. By means of polite learning alone, the patriot and the hero, the man who praiſeth virtue, and he who practices it, who fights ſucceſsfully for his country, or who dies in its defence, become immortal.

LET none affect to deſpiſe future fame, the actions of even the loweſt part of mankind testify a deſire of this kind. Wealth, titles, and ſeveral paltry advantages, are ſecured for poſterity, who can only give their applauſe in return. If all ranks, therefore, are inſpired with this paſſion,

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how

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how great should his encouragement be, who is capable of conferring it not only upon the most deserving, but even upon the age in which he lives ?

YET this honest ambition of being admired by posterity, cannot be gratified without continual efforts in the present age to deserve it. For if the rewards of genius are improperly directed ; if those who are capable of supporting the honour of the times by their writings, prefer opulence to fame ; if the stage should be shut to writers of merit, and open only to interest or intrigue. If such should happen to be the vile complexion of the times, the very virtues of the age will be forgotten by posterity ; and nothing remembered, except our filling a chasm in the registers of time, or having served to continue the species.

C H A P.

CHAP. X.

Of the encouragement of learning.

THERE is nothing authors are more apt to lament, than want of encouragement from the age. Whatever their differences in other respects may be, they are all ready to unite in this complaint, and each indirectly offers himself as an instance of the truth of his assertion.

THE beneficed divine, whose wants are only imaginary, expostulates as bitterly as the poorest author, that ever snuffed his candle with finger and thumb. Should interest or good fortune, advance the divine to a bishopric, or the poor son of Parnassus

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Parnassus into that place which the other has resign'd ; both are authors no longer, the one goes to prayers once a day, kneels upon cushions of velvet, and thanks gracious heaven for having made the circumstances of all mankind so extremely happy ; the other batters on all the delicacies of life, enjoys his wife and his easy chair, and sometimes, for the sake of conversation, deploras the luxury of these degenerate days.

ALL encouragements to merit are misapplied, which make the author too rich to continue his profession. There can be nothing more just than the old observation, that authors, like running horses, should be fed but not fattened. If we would continue them in our service, we should reward them with a little money and a great deal of praise, still keeping
their

OF PÓLITE LEARNING. 123

their avarice subservient to their ambition. Not that I think a writer incapable of filling an employment with dignity, I would only insinuate, that when made a bishop or statesman, he will continue to please us as a writer no longer. As to resume a former allusion, the running horse, when fattened, will still be fit for very useful purposes, though unqualified for a courser.

No nation gives greater encouragements to learning than we do ; yet, at the same time, none are so injudicious in the application. We seem to confer them with the same view, that statesmen have been known to grant employments at court, rather as bribes to silence, than incentives to emulation.

UPON

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UPON this principle, all our magnificent endowments of colleges are erroneous, and at best, more frequently enrich the prudent than reward the ingenious. A lad whose passions are not strong enough in youth to mislead him from that path of science, which his tutors, and not his inclinations, have chalked out, by four or five years perseverance, will probably obtain every advantage and honour his college can bestow. I forget whether the simile has been used before, but I would compare the man, whose youth has been thus past in the tranquillity of dispassionate prudence, to liquors which never ferment, and consequently, continue always muddy. Passions may raise a commotion in the youthful breast, but they disturb only to refine it. However this be, mean talents are often rewarded in colleges, with
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OF POLITE LEARNING. 125

an easy subsistence. The candidates for preferments of this kind, often regard their admission as a patent for future laziness ; so that a life begun in studious labour, is often continued in luxurious affluence.

AMONG the universities abroad, I have ever observed their riches and their learning in a reciprocal proportion, their stupidity and pride encreasing with their opulence. Happening once in conversation with Gaubius of Leyden, to mention the college of Edinburgh, he began by complaining, that all the English students, which formerly came to his university, now went intirely there ; and the fact surprized him more, as Leyden was now as well as ever furnished with masters excellent in their respective professions. He concluded by asking,
if

if the professors of Edinburgh were rich. I reply'd, that the salary of a professor there seldom amounted to more than thirty pounds a year. Poor men, says he, I heartily wish they were better provided for, until they become rich, we can have no expectation of English students at Leyden.

PREMIUMS also, proposed for literary excellence, when given as encouragements to boys may be useful, but when designed as rewards to men, are certainly misapplied. We have seldom seen a performance of any great merit, in consequence of rewards proposed in this manner. Who has ever observed a writer of any eminence, a candidate in so precarious a contest? The man who knows the real value of his own genius, will no more venture it upon an uncertainty, than he
 who

who knows the true use of a guinea, will stake it with a sharper by throwing a main.

EVERY encouragement given to stupidity, when known to be such, is also a negative insult upon genius. This appears in nothing more evident, than the undistinguished success of those who solicit subscriptions. When first brought into fashion, subscriptions were conferred upon the ingenious alone, or those who were reputed such. But at present, we see them made a resource of indigence, and requested not as rewards of merit, but as a relief of distress. If tradesmen happen to want skill in conducting their own business, yet they are able to write a book; if mechanics want money, or ladies shame, they write books and solicit subscriptions. Scarce a morning passes, that

that propofals of this nature are not thruft into the half-opening doors of the rich, with, perhaps, a paltry petition, fhewing the author's wants, but not his merits. I would not willingly prevent that pity which is due to indigence, but while the freams of liberality are thus diffufed, they muft in the end become proportionably fhallow.

WHAT then are the proper encouragements of genius? I anfwer, fubfiftance and refpect, for thefe are rewards congenial to its nature. Every animal has an aliment peculiarly fuited to its conftitution. The heavy ox feeks nourifhment from earth; the light cameleon has been fupposed to exift on air; a fparer diet even than this, will fatisfy the man of true genius, for he makes a luxurious banquet upon empty applaufe. It is this alone, which
has

OF POLITE LEARNING. 129

has inspired all that ever was truly great and noble among us. It is, as Cicero finely calls it the eccho of virtue. Avarice is the passion of inferior natures ; money the pay of the common herd. The author who draws his quill merely to take a purse, no more deserves success than he who presents a pistol.

WHEN the link between patronage and learning was entire, then all who deserved fame were in a capacity of attaining it. When the great Somers was at the helm, patronage was fashionable among our nobility. The middle ranks of mankind, who generally imitate the Great, then followed their example; and applauded from fashion, if not from feeling. I have heard an old poet of that glorious age say, that a dinner with his lordship, has
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procured

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procured him invitations for the whole week following: that an airing in his patron's chariot, has supplied him with a citizen's coach on every future occasion. For who would not be proud to entertain a man who kept so much good company?

BUT this link now seems entirely broken. Since the days of a certain prime minister of inglorious memory, the learned have been kept pretty much at a distance. A jockey, or a laced player, supplies the place of the scholar, poet, or the man of virtue. Those conversations, once the result of wisdom, wit, and innocence, are now turned to humbler topics, little more being expected from a companion than a laced coat, a pliant bow, and an
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OF POLITE LEARNING. 131

immoderate friendship for——a well-served table.

WIT, when neglected by the great, is generally despised by the vulgar. Those who are unacquainted with the world, are apt to fancy the man of wit, as leading a very agreeable life. They conclude, perhaps, that he is attended to with silent admiration, and dictates to the rest of mankind, with all the eloquence of conscious superiority. Very different is his present situation. He is called an author, and all know that an author is a thing only to be laughed at. His person, not his jest, becomes the mirth of the company. At his approach, the most fat unthinking face, brightens into malicious meaning. Even aldermen laugh, and revenge on him, the ridicule which was lavish'd on their forefathers.

K 2

Etiam

*Etiam victis redit in præcordia virtus,
Victoresque cadunt.*

It is indeed a reflection somewhat mortifying to the author, who breaks his ranks, and singles out for public favour to think that he must combat contempt, before he can arrive at glory. That he must expect to have all the fools of society united against him, before he can hope for the applause of the judicious. For this, however, he must prepare beforehand ; as those who have no idea of the difficulty of his employment, will be apt to regard his inactivity as idleness, and not having a notion of the pangs of uncomplying thought in themselves, it is not to be expected they should have any desire of rewarding by respecting them in others.

VOLTAIRE

OF POLITE LEARNING. 133

VOLTAIRE has finely described the hardships a man must encounter, who writes for the public. I need make no apology for the length of the quotation.

‘ YOUR fate, my dear Le Fevre, is too
‘ strongly marked to permit your retiring.
‘ The bee must toil in making honey,
‘ the silk-worm must spin, and the phi-
‘ losopher must dissect them, and you are
‘ born to sing of their labours. You must
‘ be a poet, and a scholar, even though
‘ your inclinations should resist; nature
‘ is too strong for inclination. But hope
‘ not, my friend, to find tranquillity in
‘ the employment you are going to pur-
‘ sue. The rout of genius is not less
‘ obstructed with disappointment, than that
‘ of ambition.

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‘ If you have the misfortune not to
‘ excel in your profession as a poet, re-
‘ pentance must tincture all your future
‘ enjoyments. If you succeed, you make
‘ enemies. You tread a narrow path, con-
‘ tempt on one side, and hatred on the
‘ other, are ready to seize you upon the
‘ slightest deviation.

‘ But, why must I be hated, you will,
‘ perhaps, reply, why must I be persecut-
‘ ed for having wrote a pleasing poem,
‘ for having produced an applauded tra-
‘ gedy, or for otherwise instructing, or a-
‘ musing mankind, or myself.

‘ My dear friend, these very successes
‘ shall render you miserable for life. Let
‘ me suppose your performance has merit,
‘ let me suppose you have surmounted
‘ the

Of POLITE LEARNING. 135

‘ the teizing employments of printing and
‘ publishing, how will you be able to lull
‘ the critics, who like Cerberus, are posted
‘ at all the avenues of literature, and
‘ who fettle the merits of every new per-
‘ formance. How, I say, will you be
‘ able to make them open in your favour ?
‘ There are always three or four literary
‘ journals in France, as many in Hol-
‘ land, each supporting opposite interests.
‘ The booksellers, who guide these perio-
‘ dical compilations, find their account in
‘ being severe ; the authors employed by
‘ them, have wretchedness to add to their
‘ natural malignity. The majority may
‘ be in your favour, but you may de-
‘ pend on being torn by the rest. Load-
‘ ed with unmerited scurrility, perhaps
‘ you reply ; they rejoin, both plead at the

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‘ bar

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' bar of the public, and both are condemn-
' ed to ridicule.

' But if you write for the stage, your
' case is still more worthy compassion.
' You are there to be judged by men,
' whom the custom of the times has ren-
' dered contemptible. Irritated by their
' own inferiority, they exert all their little
' tyranny upon you, revenging upon the
' author, the insults they receive from the
' public. From such men then you are
' to expect your sentence. Suppose your
' piece admitted, acted : one single ill-na-
' tured jest from the pit, is sufficient to
' cancel all your labours. But allowing
' that it succeeds. There are an hundred
' squibs flying all abroad to prove, that it
' should not have succeeded. You shall
' find your brightest scenes burlesqued by
' the

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‘ the ignorant; and the learned, who know
‘ a little Greek, and nothing of their na-
‘ tive language, affect to despise you.

‘ BUT, perhaps, with a panting heart,
‘ you carry your piece before a woman
‘ of quality. She gives the labours of your
‘ brain to her maid, to be cut into
‘ shreds for curling her hair ; while the
‘ laced footman, who carries the gaudy
‘ livery of luxury, insults your appear-
‘ ance, who bears the livery of indigence.

‘ BUT granting your excellence has at
‘ last forced envy to confess, that your
‘ works have some merit ; this then is all
‘ the reward you can expect while living.
‘ However, for this tribute of applause,
‘ you must expect persecution. You will
‘ be reputed the author of scandal which
‘ you

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‘ you have never seen, of verses you de-
‘ spise, and of sentiments directly contrary
‘ to your own. In short, you must em-
‘ bark in some one party, or all parties will
‘ be against you.

‘ THERE are among us, a number of
‘ learned societies, where a lady presides,
‘ whose wit begins to twinkle, when the
‘ splendour of her beauty begins to decline.
‘ One or two men of learning compose
‘ her ministers of state. These must be
‘ flattered, or made enemies by being neg-
‘ lected. Thus, though you had the
‘ merit of all antiquity united in your
‘ person, you grow old in misery and dis-
‘ grace. Every place designed for men
‘ of letters, is filled up by men of in-
‘ trigue. Some nobleman’s private tutor,
‘ some court flatterer, shall bear away the

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‘ prize, and leave you to anguish and to
‘ disappointment.’

YET it were well, if none but the dunces of society, were combined to render the profession of an author ridiculous or unhappy. Men of the first eminence are often found to indulge this illiberal vein of raillery. Two contending writers often by the opposition of their wit, render their profession contemptible in the eyes of ignorants, who should have been taught to admire. Whatever the reader may think of himself, it is at least two to one, but he is a greater blockhead than the most scribbling dunce he affects to despise.

THE poet's poverty is a standing topic of contempt. His writing for bread is an unpardonable offence. Perhaps, of all mankind, an author, in these
times,

times, is used most hardly. We keep him poor, and yet revile his poverty. Like angry parents, who correct their children till they cry, and then correct them for crying, we reproach him for living by his wit, and yet allow him no other means to live.

His taking refuge in garrets and cellars, and living among vermin, have, of late, been violently objected to him, and that by men, who I dare hope, are more apt to pity than insult his distress. Is poverty the writer's fault? No doubt, he knows how to prefer a bottle of champaign, to the nectar of the neighbouring alehouse, or a venison pasty to a plate of potatoes. Want of delicacy is not in him, but in us, who deny him the opportunity of making an elegant choice.

WIT

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WIT certainly is the property of those who have it, nor should we be displeased if it is the only property a man sometimes has. We must not under-rate him who uses it for subsistence, and flies from the ingratitude of the age, even to a book-feller for redress. If the profession of an author is to be laughed at by stupid, it is better sure to be contemptibly rich, than contemptibly poor. For all the wit that ever adorned the human mind, will at present no more shield the author's poverty from ridicule, than his high topped gloves conceal the unavoidable omissions of his laundress.

To be more serious, new fashions, follies, and vices, make new monitors necessary in every age. An author may be considered as a merciful substitute to the
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legislature ; he acts not by punishing crimes, but preventing them ; however virtuous the present age, there may be still growing employment for ridicule, or reproof, for persuasion, or satire. If the author be, therefore, still so necessary among us, let us treat him with proper consideration, as a child of the public, not a rent-charge on the community. And, indeed, a *child* of the public he is in all respects ; for while so well able to direct others, how incapable is he frequently found of guiding himself. His simplicity exposes him to all the insidious approaches of cunning, his sensibility to the slightest invasions of contempt. Though possessed of fortitude to stand unmoved the expected bursts of an earthquake, yet of feelings so exquisitely poignant, as to agonize under the slightest disappointment.

Broken

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Broken rest, tasteless meals, and causeless anxiety, shorten his life, or render it unfit for active employment ; prolonged vigils, and intense application still farther contract his span, and make his time glide insensibly away. Let us not then aggravate those natural inconveniencies by neglect ; we have had sufficient instances of this kind already. Sale, Savage, Amherst, More, will suffice for one age at least. But they are dead, and their sorrows are over. The neglected author of the Persian eclogues, which, however inaccurate, excel any in our language, is still alive. Happy, if *insensible* of our neglect, not *raging* at our ingratitude. It is enough, that the age has already yielded instances of men pressing foremost in the lists of fame, and worthy of better times, schooled by continued adversity into an hatred of
their

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their kind, flying from thought to drunkenness, yielding to the united pressure of labour, penury, and sorrow, sinking unheeded, without one friend to drop a tear on their unattended obsequies, and indebted to charity for a grave among the dregs of mankind.

THE author, when unpatronized by the Great, has naturally recourse to the bookseller. There cannot be, perhaps, imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible ; accordingly, tedious compilations, and periodical magazines, are the result of their joint endeavours. In these circumstances, the author bids adieu to fame, writes for bread, and for that only.

Imagi-

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Imagination is seldom called in ; he sits down to address the venial muse with the most phlegmatic apathy ; and, as we are told of the Russian, courts his mistress by falling asleep in her lap. His reputation never spreads in a wider circle than that of the trade, who generally value him, not for the fineness of his composition, but the quantity he works off in a given time.

A LONG habitude of writing for bread, thus turns the ambition of every author at last into avarice. He finds, that he has wrote many years, that the public are scarcely acquainted even with his name ; he despairs of applause, and turns to profit, which invites him. He finds that money procures all those advantages, that respect, and that ease, which he vainly

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expected from fame. Thus the man, who under the protection of the Great, might have done honour to humanity, when only patronized by the bookseller, becomes a thing little superior to the fellow who works at the press.

Sint Mæcenates, non deerunt, Flacce, Marones.

CHAP.

C H A P. XI.

Upon Criticism.

BUT there are still some men, whom fortune has blessed with affluence, to whom the muse pays her morning visit, not like a creditor, but a friend: to this happy few, who have leisure to polish what they write, and liberty to chuse their own subjects, I would direct my advice, which consists in a few words: *Write what you think, regardless of the critics.* To persuade to this, was the chief design of this essay. To break, or at least to loosen those bonds, first put on by caprice, and afterwards drawn hard by fashion, is my

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with.

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with. I have assumed the critic only to dissuade from criticism.

THERE is scarce an error of which our present writers are guilty, that does not arise from this source. From this proceeds the affected obscurity of our odes, the tuneless flow of our blank verse, the pompous epithet, laboured diction, and every other deviation from common sense, which procures the poet the applause of the connoisseur; he is praised by all, read by a few, and soon forgotten.

THERE never was an unbeaten path trodden by the poet, that the critic did not endeavour to reclaim him, by calling his attempt innovation. This might be instanced in Dante, who first followed na-

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ture,

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ture, and was persecuted by the critics as long as he lived. Thus novelty, one of the greatest beauties in poetry, must be avoided, or the connoisseur be displeased. It is one of the chief privileges, however, of genius, to fly from the herd of imitators by some happy singularity; for should he stand still, his heavy pursuers will at length certainly come up, and fairly dispute the victory.

THE ingenious Mr. Hogarth used to assert, that every one, except the connoisseur, was a judge of painting. The same may be asserted of writing; the public in general set the whole piece in the proper point of view; the critic lays his eye close to all its minutenesses, and condemns or approves in detail. And this may be

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the reason why so many writers at present, are apt to appeal from the tribunal of criticism to that of the people.

FROM a desire in the critic of grafting the spirit of ancient languages upon the English, has proceeded of late several disagreeable instances of pedantry. Among the number, I think we may reckon blank verse. Nothing but the greatest sublimity of subject can render such a measure pleasing; however, we now see it used upon the most trivial occasions; it has particularly found way into our didactic poetry, and is likely to bring that species of composition into disrepute, for which the English are deservedly famous.

THOSE who are acquainted with writing, know that our language runs almost
natu-

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naturally into blank verse. The writers of our novels, romances, and all of this class, who have no notion of stile, naturally hobble into this unharmonious measure. If rhymes, therefore, be more difficult, for that very reason, I would have our poets write in rhyme. Such a restriction upon the thought of a good poet, often lifts and encreases the vehemence of every sentiment ; for fancy, like a fountain, plays highest by diminishing the aperture. But rhymes, it will be said, are a remnant of monkish stupidity, an innovation upon the poetry of the ancients. They are but indifferently acquainted with antiquity, who make the assertion. Rhymes are probably of older date than either the Greek or Latin dactyl and spondé. The Celtic, which is allowed to be the first language spoken in Europe, has ever

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preserved them, as we may find in the Edda of Iceland, and the Irish carrols still sung among the original inhabitants of that island. Olaus Wormius gives us some of the Teutonic poetry in this way ; and Pantoppidan, bishop of Bergen, some of the Norwegian ; in short, this jingle of sounds is almost natural to mankind, at least, it is so to our language, if we may judge from many unsuccessful attempts to throw it off.

I SHOULD not have employed so much time in opposing this erroneous innovation, if it were not apt to introduce another in its train : I mean, a disgusting solemnity of manner into our poetry ; and as the prose writer has been ever found to follow the poet, it must consequently banish in both, all that agreeable

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able trifling, which, if I may so express it, often deceives us into instruction. Dry reasoning, and dull morality, have no force with the wild fantastic libertine. He must be met with smiles, and courted with the allurements of gaiety. He must be taught to believe, that he is in pursuit of pleasure, and be surprized into reformation. The finest sentiment, and the most weighty truth, may put on a pleasing face, and it is even virtuous to jest when serious advice might be disgusting. But instead of this, the most trifling performance among us now, assumes all the didactic stiffness of wisdom. The most diminutive son of fame, or of famine, has his *we* and his *us*, his *firstlys* and his *secondlys* as methodical, as if bound in cow-hide, and closed with clasps of brass. Were these Monthly Reviews
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and Magazines frothy, pert, or absurd, they might find some pardon ; but to be dull and dronish, is an encroachment on the prerogative of a folio.

THESE pamphlets should be considered as pills to purge melancholly ; they should be made up in our splenetic climate, to be taken as physic, and not so as to be used when we take it. Some such law should be enacted in the republic of letters, as we find take place in the house of commons. As no man there can shew his wisdom, unless first qualified by three hundred pounds a year, so none here should profess gravity, unless his work amounted to three hundred pages.

HOWEVER, by the power of one single monosyllable, our critics have almost got the victory over humour amongst us.

Does

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Does the poet paint the absurdities of the vulgar; then he is *low*: does he exaggerate the features of folly, to render it more thoroughly ridiculous, he is then very *low*. In short, they have proscribed the comic or satyrical muse from every walk but high life, which, though abounding in fools as well as the humblest station, is by no means so fruitful in absurdity. Among well-bred fools we may despise much, but have little to laugh at; nature seems to present us with an universal blank of filk, ribbands, smiles and whispers; absurdity is the poet's game, and good breeding is the nice concealment of absurdities. The truth is, the critic generally mistakes humour for wit, which is a very different excellence. Wit raises human nature above its level; humour acts a contrary part, and equally depresses it. To expect exalted humour, is a contradiction in terms;
and

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and the critic, by demanding an impossibility from the comic poet, has, in effect, banished new comedy from the stage. But to put the same thought in a different light :

WHEN an unexpected similitude in two objects strikes the imagination ; in other words, when a thing is *wittily* expressed, all our pleasure turns into admiration of the artist, who had fancy enough to draw the picture. When a thing is *humourously* described, our burst of laughter proceeds from a very different cause ; we compare the absurdity of the character represented with our own, and triumph in our conscious superiority. No natural defect can be a cause of laughter, because it is a misfortune to which ourselves are liable ; a defect of this kind, changes the passion into pity or horror ; we only laugh at those instances of moral absurdity,

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dity, to which we are conscious that we ourselves are not liable. For instance, should I describe a man as wanting his nose, there is no humour in this, as it is an accident to which human nature is subject, and may be any man's case : but should I represent this man without his nose, as extremely curious in the choice of his snuff-box, we here see him guilty of an absurdity of which we imagine ourselves can never be guilty, and therefore applaud our own good sense on the comparison. Thus, then, the pleasure we receive from wit, turns on the admiration of another ; that we feel from humour, centers in the admiration of ourselves. The poet, therefore, must place the object he would have the subject of humour in a state of inferiority ; in other words, the subject of humour must be low.

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THE solemnity worn by many of our modern writers is, I fear, often the mask of dulness ; for certain it is, it seems to fit every author who pleases to put it on. By the complexion of many of our late publications, one might be apt to cry out with Cicero, *Civem mehercule non puto esse qui his temporibus ridere possit.* On my conscience, I believe we have all forgot to laugh in these days. Such writers probably make no distinction between what is praised, and what is pleasing ; between those commendations which the reader pays his own discernment, and those which are the genuine result of his sensations.

As our gentlemen writers have it therefore so much in their power to lead the taste of the times, they may now part with the inflated stile that has for some
years

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years been looked upon as fine writing, and which every young writer is now obliged to adopt, if he chuses to be read. They may now dispense with loaded epithet, and dressing up of trifles with dignity. For to use an obvious instance, it is not those who make the greatest noise with their wares in the streets, that have most to sell. Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally. Not hunt after lofty expressions to deliver mean ideas; nor be for ever gaping, when we only mean to deliver a whisper.

CHAP.

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C H A P. XII.

Of the STAGE.

OUR Theatre may be regarded as partaking of the shew and decoration of the Italian opera, with the propriety and declamation of French performance. Our stage is more magnificent than any other in Europe, and the people in general fonder of theatrical entertainment. But as our pleasures, as well as more important concerns, are generally managed by party, the stage is subject to its influence. The managers, and all who espouse their side, are for decoration and ornament; the critic, and all who have studied French decorum, are for regularity and declamation. Thus it is almost

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most impossible to please both parties, and the poet, by attempting it, finds himself often incapable of pleasing either. If he introduces stage pomp, the critic consigns his performance to the vulgar; if he indulges in recital, and simplicity, he is accused of insipidity or dry affectation.

FROM the nature therefore of our theatre, and the genius of our country, it is extremely difficult for a dramatic poet to please his audience. But happy would he be were these the only difficulties he had to encounter; there are many other more dangerous combinations against the little wit of the age. Our poet's performance must undergo a process truly chymical before it is presented to the public. It must be tried in the manager's fire, strain-

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ed through a licenser, and purified in the Review, or the news-paper of the day. At this rate, before it can come to a private table, it may probably be a mere caput mortuum, and only proper entertainment for the licenser, manager, or critic himself. But it may be answered, 'that we have a sufficient number of plays upon our theatres already, and therefore there is no need of new ones. But are they sufficiently good? And is the credit of our age nothing? Must our present times pass away unnoticed by posterity? We are desirous of leaving them liberty, wealth, and titles, and we can have no recompence but their applause. The title of Learned given to an age, is the most glorious applause, and shall this be disregarded? Our reputation among foreigners will quickly be discontinued, when we discontinue our efforts to deserve it, and shall we despise their
praise?

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praise? Are our new absurdities, with which no nation more abounds, to be left unnoticed? Is the pleasure such performances give upon the perusal, to be entirely given up? If these are all matters of indifference, it then signifies nothing, whether we are to be entertained with the actor or the poet, with fine sentiments, or painted canvas, or whether the dancer, or the carpenter, be constituted master of the ceremonies.

BUT they are not matters of indifference. Every age produces new follies and new vices, and one absurdity is often displaced in order to make room for another. The dramatic poet, however, who should be, and has often been, a firm champion in the cause of virtue, detects all the new machinations of vice, levels his satire at the rising structures of folly,

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or drives her from behind the retrenchments of fashion. Thus far then, the poet is useful ; but how far the actor, that dear favourite of the public, may be so, is a question, next to be determined.

As the poet's merit is often not sufficient to introduce his performance among the public with proper dignity, he is often obliged to call in the assistance of decoration and dress to contribute to this effect. By this means a performance, which pleases on the stage, often instructs in the closet, and for one who has seen it acted, hundreds will be readers. The actor then is useful, by introducing the works of the poet to the public with becoming splendor ; but when these have once become popular, I must confess myself so much a sceptic

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tic, as to think it would be more for the interests of virtue, if such performances were read, not acted; made rather our companions in the closet, than on the theatre. While we are readers, every moral sentiment strikes us in all its beauty, but the love scenes are frigid, tawdry, and disgusting. When we are spectators, all the persuasives to vice receive an additional lustre. The love scene is aggravated, the obscenity heightened, the best actors figure in the most debauched characters, while the parts of dull morality, as they are called, are thrown to some mouthing machine, who puts even virtue out of countenance, by his wretched imitation. The principal performers find their interest in chusing such parts as tend to promote, not the benefit of society, but their own reputation; and in

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using arts which inspire emotions very different from those of morality. How many young men go to the playhouse speculatively in love with the rule of right, but return home actually enamour'd of an actress?

I HAVE often attended to the reflections of the company upon leaving the theatre; one actor had the finest pipe, but the other the most melodious voice; one was a bewitching creature, another a charming devil; and such are generally our acquisitions at the play-house: It brings to my remembrance an old lady, who being passionately fond of a famous preacher, went every Sunday to church, but, struck only with his graceful manner of delivery, disregarded and forgot the truths of his discourse.

BUT

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BUT it is needless to mention the incentives to vice which are found at the theatre, or the immorality of some of the performers. Such impeachments, though true, would be regarded as cant, while their exhibitions continue to amuse. I would only infer from hence, that an actor is chiefly useful in introducing new performances upon the stage, since the reader receives more benefit by perusing a well written play in his closet, than by seeing it acted. I would also infer, that to the poet is to be ascribed all the good that attends seeing plays, and to the actor all the harm.

BUT how is this rule inverted on our theatres at present? Old pieces are revived, and scarce any new ones admitted; the actor is ever in our eye, and the poet seldom permitted to appear; the public are again

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obliged to ruminate those hashes of absurdity, which were disgusting to our ancestors, even in an age of ignorance ; and the stage, instead of serving the people, is made subservient to the interests of an avaricious few. We must now tamely see the literary honours of our country suppressed that an actor may dine with elegance ; we must tamely sit and see the celestial muse made a slave to the histrionic Dæmon,

WE seem to be pretty much in the situation of travellers at a Scotch inn, vile entertainment is served up, complained of and sent down, up comes worse, and that also is changed, and every change makes our wretched cheer more unfavoury. What must be done ? only sit down contented,

cry

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cry up all that comes before us, and admire even the absurdities of Shakespear.

LET the reader suspend his censure; I admire the beauties of this great father of our stage as much as they deserve, but could wish, for the honour of our country, and for his honour too, that many of his scenes were forgotten. A man blind of one eye, should always be painted in profile. Let the spectator who assists at any of these new revived pieces, only ask himself, whether he would approve such a performance if written by a modern poet; if he would not, then his applause proceeds merely from the sound of a name and an empty veneration for antiquity. In fact, the revival of these pieces of forced humour, far fetch'd conceit, and unnatural hyperbole, which have been ascribed to Shakespear,

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sppear, is rather gibbeting than raising a statue to his memory ; it is rather a trick of the actor, who thinks it safest acting in exaggerated characters, and who by out-stepping nature, chuses to exhibit the ridiculous outré of an harlequin under the sanction of this venerable name.

WHAT strange vamp'd comedies, farcical tragedies, or what shall I call them, speaking pantomimes, have we not of late seen. No matter what the play may be, it is the actor who draws an audience. He throws life into all ; all are in spirits and merry, in at one door and out at another ; the spectator, in a fool's paradise, knows not what all this means till the last act concludes in matrimony. The piece pleases our critics, because it talks old English ; and it pleases the galleries, because it has fun. True taste, or even common sense, are out of the question.

BUT

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BUT great art must be sometimes used before they can thus impose upon the public. To this purpose, a prologue written with some spirit generally precedes the piece, to inform us that it was composed by Shakespear, or old Ben, or somebody else, who took them for his model. A face of iron could not have the assurance to avow dislike ; the theatre has its partizans who understand the force of combinations, trained up to vociferation, clapping of hands, and clattering of sticks ; and tho' a man might have strength sufficient to overcome a lion in single combat, by an army even of mice, he may run the risk of being eaten up marrow-bones and all.

I AM not insensible that third nights are disagreeable drawbacks upon the annual profits of the stage ; I am confident, it is much
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more to the manager's advantage to furbish up all the lumber, which the good sense of our ancestors, but for his care, had consign'd to oblivion; it is not with him therefore, but with the public I would expostulate; they have a right to demand respect, and sure those new revived plays are no instances of the manager's deference.

I HAVE been informed, that no new play can be admitted upon our theatre unless the author chuses to wait some years, or to use the phrase in fashion, till it comes to be played in turn. A poet thus can never expect to contract a familiarity with the stage, by which alone he can hope to succeed, nor can the most signal success relieve immediate want. Our Saxon ancestors had but one name for a
wit

wit and a witch. I will not dispute the propriety of uniting those characters then ; but the man who under the present discouragements ventures to write for the stage now, whatever claim he may have to the appellation of a wit, at least, he has no right to be called a conjuror.

YET getting a play on even in three or four years, is a privilege reserved only for the happy few who have the arts of courting the manager as well as the muse : who have adulation to please his vanity, powerful patrons to support their merit, or money to indemnify disappointment. The poet must act like our beggars at Christmas, who lay the first shilling on the plate for themselves. Thus all wit is banished from the stage, except it be supported by friends, or fortune, and poets are seldom over-burthened with either.

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I AM not at present writing for a party, but above theatrical connections in every sense of the expression ; I have no particular spleen against the fellow who sweeps the stage with the besom, or the hero who brushes it with his train. It were a matter of indifference to me, whether our heroines are in keeping, or our candle-snuffers burn their fingers, did not such make a great part of public care, and polite conversation. It is not these, but the age I would reproach : the vile complexion of the times, when those employ our most serious thoughts and separate us into parties, whose business is only to amuse our idlest hours. I cannot help reproaching our meanness in this respect ; for our stupidity, and our folly, will be remembered, when even the attitudes and eye brows of a favourite actor shall be forgotten.

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IN the times of Addison and Steele, players were held in greater contempt than, perhaps, they deserved. Honest Eastcourt, Verbruggen and Underhill, were extremely poor, and assumed no airs of insolence. They were contented with being merry at a city feast, with promoting the mirth of a set of cheerful companions, and gave their jest for their reckoning. At that time, it was kind to say something in defence of the poor good-natured creatures, if it were only to keep them in good humour ; but at present, such encouragements are unnecessary. Our actors assume all that state off the stage which they do on it ; and to use an expression borrow'd from the Green Room, every one is *up* in his part. I am sorry to say it, they seem to forget their real characters ; more provoking still, the public seems to forget them too.

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MACROBIUS has preserved a prologue, spoken and written by the poet Laberius, a Roman knight, whom Cæsar forced upon the stage, written with great elegance and spirit, which shews what opinion the Romans in general entertained of the profession of an actor.

Necessitas cæjus cursus transversæ impetum, &c.

What! no way left to shun th' inglorious
stage,

And save from infamy my sinking age.

Scarce half alive, oppress'd with many a year,

What in the name of dotage drives me here?

A time there was, when glory was my guide,

Nor force nor fraud could turn my steps
aside,

Unaw'd by pow'r and unappal'd by fear,

With honest thrift I held my honour dear,

But

But this vile hour disperses all my store,
And all my hoard of honour is no more.
For ah ! too partial to my life's decline,
Cæsar persuades, submission must be mine,
Him I obey, whom heaven itself obeys,
Hopeless of pleasing, yet inclin'd to please.
Here then at once, I welcome every shame,
And cancel at threescore a life of fame ;
No more my titles shall my children tell,
The old buffoon will fit my name as well ;
This day beyond its term my fate extends,
For life is ended when our honour ends.

FROM all that has been said upon the state of our theatre, we may easily foresee, whether it is likely to improve or decline; and whether the free-born muse can bear to submit to those restrictions, which avarice or power would impose. For the future, it is somewhat unlikely, that he,

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whose labours are valuable, or who knows their value, will turn to the stage for either fame or subsistence, when he must at once flatter an actor, and please an audience.

LET no manager impute this to spleen, or disappointment. I only assert the claims of the public, and endeavour to vindicate a profession which has hitherto wanted a defender. A mean or mercenary conduct may continue for some time to triumph over opposition, but it is possible the public will at last be taught to vindicate their privileges. Perhaps, there may come a time, when the poet will be at liberty to encrease the entertainments of the people; but such a period may possibly not arise till our discouragements have banished poetry from the stage.

CHAP.

OF POLITE LEARNING. 179

C H A P. XIII.

On UNIVERSITIES.

INSTEAD of losing myself in a subject of such extent, I shall only offer a few thoughts as they occur, and leave their connection to the reader.

WE seem divided, whether an education formed by travelling, or by a sedentary life, be preferable. We see more of the world by travel, but more of human nature by remaining at home. As in an infirmary, the student who only attends to the disorders of a few patients, is more likely to understand his profession, than he who indiscriminately examines them all.

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A YOUTH just landed at the Brille resembles a clown at a puppet-show ; carries his amazement from one miracle to another ; from this cabinet of curiosities, to that collection of pictures : but wondering is not the way to grow wise.

WHATEVER resolutions we set ourselves not to keep company with our countrymen abroad, we shall find them broken when once we leave home. Among strangers, we consider ourselves as in a solitude, and 'tis but natural to desire society.

IN all the great towns of Europe, there are to be found Englishmen residing either from interest or choice ; these generally lead a life of continued debauchery ; such are the

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countrymen a traveller is likely to meet with.

THIS may be the reason why Englishmen are all thought to be mad, or melancholly, by the vulgar abroad. Their money is giddily and merrily spent among sharpers of their own country, and when that is gone, of all nations, the English bear worst that disorder called the *maladie du poche*.

COUNTRIES wear very different appearances to travellers of different circumstances. A man who is whirled through Europe in a post chaise, and the pilgrim who walks the grand tour on foot, will form very different conclusions.

Haud inexpertus loquor.

N 3

To

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To see Europe with advantage, a man should appear in various circumstances of fortune, but the experiment would be too dangerous for young men.

THERE are many things relative to other countries, which can be learned to more advantage at home ; their laws and policies are among the number.

THE greatest advantages which result to youth from travel, is an easy address, the wearing off national prejudices, and the finding nothing ridiculous in national peculiarities. The time spent in these acquisitions, could have been more usefully employed at home. An education in a college seems, therefore, preferable.

It

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It has lately been disputed, whether the arts and sciences do most benefit, or injury to mankind. Mere speculative trifling. Ask the house-breaker or highwayman, in what university they were bred. They will answer, In none.

WE attribute to universities either too much or too little. Some assert, that they are the only proper places to advance learning; while others deny even their utility in forming an education. Both are erroneous.

LEARNING is most advanced in populous cities, where chance often conspires with industry to promote it; where the members of this larger university, if I may so call it, catch manners as they rise,

N 4

study

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study life, not logic, and have the world for correspondents.

THE greatest number of universities have ever been founded in times of the greatest ignorance.

NEW improvements in learning, are seldom adopted in collèges, until admitted every where else. And this is right ; we should always be cautious of teaching the rising generation uncertainties for truth.

THOUGH the professors in universities have been too frequently found to oppose the advancement of learning ; yet when once established, they are the properest persons to diffuse it.

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THE rudiments of learning are best implanted in a college, the cultivation of it is best promoted in the world.

THERE is more knowlege to be acquired from one page of the volume of mankind, if the scholar only knows how to read, than in volumes of antiquity ; we grow learned, not wise, by too long a continuance at college.

THIS points out the time in which we should leave the university ; perhaps, the age of twenty-one, when at our universities the first degree is generally taken, is the proper period.

THE universities of Europe may be divided into three classes. Those upon the old scholastic establishment, where the pupils

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pils are immured, talk nothing but Latin, and support every day syllogistical disputations in school philosophy. Would not one be apt to imagine, this was the proper education to make a man a fool ! Such are the universities of Prague, Louvain, and Padua. The second is, where the pupils are under few restrictions; where all scholastic jargon is banished, where they take a degree when they think proper, and live not in the college but city. Such are Edinburgh, Leyden, Gottingen, Geneva. The third is a mixture of the two former, where the pupils are restrained, but not confined; where many, though not all, the absurdities of scholastic philosophy are suppressed, and where the first degree is taken after four years matriculation. Such are Oxford, Cambridge, and Dublin.

As

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As for the first class, their absurdities are too apparent to admit of a parallel. It is disputed, which of the two last are most conducive to national improvement

SKILL in the professions is acquired more by practice than study, two or three years may be sufficient for learning their rudiments. The universities of Edinburgh, &c. grant a licence for practising them, when the student thinks proper, which our universities refuse till after a residence of several years.

THE dignity of the professions may be supported by this dilatory proceeding, but many men of learning are thus too long excluded from the lucrative advantages, which superior skill has a right to expect.

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THOSE universities must certainly be most frequented, who promise to give in two years the advantages, which others will not under twelve.

THE man who has studied a profession for three years, and practised it for nine more, will certainly know more of his business, than he who has only studied it for twelve.

THE universities of Edinburgh, &c. must certainly be most proper for the study of those professions, in which men chuse to turn their learning to profit as soon as possible.

THE universities of Oxford, &c. are improper for this, since they keep the student from the world, which, after a certain

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tain time, is the only true school of improvement.

WHEN a degree in the professions can be taken only by men of independent fortune, the number of candidates in learning is lessened, and consequently the advancement of learning retarded.

THIS slowness of conferring degrees is a remnant of scholastic barbarity. Paris, Louvain, and those universities which still retain their ancient institutions, confer the doctor's degree slower even than we.

THE statutes of every university should be considered as adapted to the laws of its respective government. Those should alter as these happen to fluctuate.

FOUR

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FOUR years spent in the arts (as they are called in colleges) is, perhaps, laying too laborious a foundation. Entering a profession without any previous acquisitions of this kind, is building too bold a superstructure.

TEACHING by lecture, as at Edinburgh, may make men scholars, if they think proper; but instructing by examination, as at Oxford, will make them so, often against their inclination.

EDINBURGH only disposes the student to receive learning; Oxford often makes him actually learned.

IN a word, were I poor, I should send my son to Leyden, or Edinburgh, tho' the annual expence in either, particular-

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ly in the first, is very great. Were I rich, I would send him to one of our own universities. By an education received in the first, he has the best likelihood of living; by that received in the latter, he has the best chance of becoming great.

WE have of late heard much of the necessity of studying oratory. Vespasian was the first who paid professors of rhetoric, for publicly instructing youth at Rome. However those pedants never made an orator.

THE best orations that ever were spoken, were pronounced in the parliaments of King Charles the first. These men never studied the rules of oratory.

MA.

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MATHEMATICS are, perhaps, too much studied at our universities. This seems a science, to which the meanest intellects are equal. I forget who it is that says, 'All men might understand mathematics, if they would.'

THE most methodical manner of lecturing, whether on morals or nature, is first rationally to explain, and then produce the experiment. The most instructive method is to shew the experiment first ; curiosity is then excited and attention awakened to every subsequent deduction. From hence, it is evident, that in a well-formed education, a course of history should ever precede a course of ethics.

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THE sons of our nobility are permitted to enjoy greater liberties in our universities, than those of private men. I should blush to ask the men of learning and virtue, who preside in our seminaries, the reason of such a prejudicial distinction. Our youth should there be inspired with a love of philosophy: and the first maxim among philosophers is, that merit only makes distinction.

WHENCE has proceeded the vain magnificence of expensive architecture in our colleges? Is it, that men study to more advantage in a palace than in a cell? One single performance of taste, or genius, confers more real honours on its parent university, than all the labours of the chissel.

O

SURE

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SURE pride itself has dictated to the fellows of our colleges, the absurd passion of being attended at meals, and on other public occasions, by those poor men, who, willing to be scholars, come in upon some charitable foundation. It implies a contradiction, for men to be at once learning the *liberal* arts, and at the same time treated as *slaves*, at once studying freedom, and practising servitude.

CHAP.

C H A P. XIV.

The C O N C L U S I O N.

EVERY subject acquires an adventitious importance to him who considers it with application. He finds it more closely connected with human happiness, than the rest of mankind are apt to allow ; he sees consequences resulting from it, which do not strike others with equal conviction, and still pursuing speculation beyond the bounds of reason, too frequently becomes ridiculously earnest in trifles, or absurdity.

It will, perhaps, be incurring this imputation, to deduce an universal degeneracy of manners, from so slight an origin as the

O 2 deprava-

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depravation of taste ; to assert, that as a nation grows dull, it sinks into debauchery. Yet such, probably, may be the consequence of literary decay ; or, not to stretch the thought beyond what it will bear, vice and stupidity are always mutually productive of each other.

LIFE at the greatest and best, has been compared to a forward child, that must be humoured, and play'd with, till it falls asleep, and then all the care is over. Our few years are laboured away in varying its pleasures ; new amusements are pursued with studious attention ; the most childish vanities are dignified with titles of importance ; and the proudest boast of the most aspiring philosopher is no more than that he provides his little playfellows the greatest pastime with the greatest innocence.

THUS

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THUS the mind ever wandering after amusement, when abridged of happiness on one part, endeavours to find it on another, when intellectual pleasures are disagreeable, those of sense will take the lead. The man, who, in this age, is enamoured of the tranquil joys of study and retirement, may, in the next, should learning be fashionable no longer, feel an ambition of being foremost at an horse-course; or if such could be the absurdity of the times, of being himself a jockey. Reason and appetite are therefore masters of our revels in turn; and as we incline to the one, or pursue the other, we rival angels, or imitate the brutes. In the pursuit of intellectual pleasure, lies every virtue; of sensual, every vice.

It is this difference of pursuit, which marks the morals and characters of mankind;

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kind ; which lays the line between the enlightened philosopher, and the half-taught citizen ; between the civil citizen and the illiterate peasant ; between the law-obeying peasant, and the wandering savage of Africa, an animal less mischievous indeed, than the tyger, because endued with fewer powers of doing mischief. The man, the nation, must therefore be good, whose chiefest luxuries consist in the refinement of reason ; and reason can never be universally cultivated unless guided by Taste, which may be considered as the link between science and common sense, the medium through which learning should ever be seen by society.

TASTE will, therefore, often be a proper standard, when others fail, to judge of a nation's improvement, or degeneracy
in

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in morals. We have often no permanent characteristics by which to compare the virtues or the vices of our ancestors with our own ; a generation may rise and pass away, without leaving any traces of what it really was, and all complaints of our deterioration, may be only topics of declamation, or the cavillings of disappointment : but in taste, we have standing evidence; we can, with precision, compare the literary performances of our fathers with our own, and from their excellence, or defects, determine the moral, as well as the literary merits of either.

If then, there ever comes a time, when taste is so far depraved among us, that critics shall load every work of genius with unnecessary comment, and quarter their empty performances, with the substantial merit of an author, both for sub-

sistence

sistence and applause; if there comes a time, when censure shall speak in storms, but praise be whispered in the breeze, while real excellence often finds shipwreck in either; if there be a time, when the muse shall seldom be heard, except in plaintive elegy, as if she wept her own decline, while lazy compilations supply the place of original thinking; should there ever be such a time, may succeeding critics, both for the honour of our morals as well as our learning, say, that such a period bears no resemblance to the present age.

F I N I S.

